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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

"THE MAGICAL COUNTRY: A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE NOVELS OF PATRICIA WRIGHTSON"

BY

JOHN DAVID MURRAY

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND
RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING 1991

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SUBMITTED BY JOHN DAVID MURRAY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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For four generations of friends

Abstract

This thesis examines the novels of Patricia Wrightson, focusing on those in which she has created a distinctively Australian version of fantasy. As a writer within the predominantly romantic literary tradition of Australia, Wrightson accords great importance to the Australian landscape, to individual consciousness of connection to the world and of separation from it, and to the restoration of individual wholeness lost with the passing of childhood. Wrightson has sought such wholeness in Australian Aboriginal culture, in connection to the landscape, and in self-formation achieved through endurance -- three elements often combined by Australian authors in the form of a journey of discovery and self-discovery in the interior of the land. In her richest and most original novels, Wrightson has combined this journey of self-discovery with fantasy that uses magic based upon elements of Aboriginal folklore.

In her realistic works, Wrightson rapidly and deliberately moves beyond the simple adventure story to novels dealing with themes of connection and separation, often using the conventions of romantic pastoral. In The Nargun and the Stars, however, her use of a technique resembling that of magical realism enables her to present a convincing combination of fantasy and pastoral in a contemporary Australian setting and to deal with the development of her protagonist towards individuation. In the ambitious Wirrun trilogy, Wrightson combines fantasy based upon Aboriginal folklore with the interior journey of the Australian romantic tradition in an attempt to examine

the entire process of male and female individuation, again in a contemporary Australian setting. Wrightson returns to the short novel with A Little Fear, using, with similar success, a combination of techniques resembling those used in The Nargun and the Stars. Her most recent works, Moon-Dark and Balyet, use Aboriginal material in animal fantasy and in a novel of adolescent development.

This thesis proposes that Wrightson's most successful novels are those that maintain close links between the figures of Aboriginal folklore and features of the landscape, combine fantasy and pastoral to depict aspects of the individuation of a single protagonist, and do so in a brief compass that encourages layering and multiplicity of meaning.

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Chapter One

Land and Legend: Patricia Wrightson and the Australian Literary Tradition

Patricia Wrightson wrote her first book for and about her two children, intending to proceed, as her confidence grew, to writing fiction for adults. Thirty-two years later, in Tokyo, she became Australia's first recipient of the Hans Christian Andersen Medal, one of the world's most prestigious awards for children's authors and illustrators. She is still writing for children, though in ways she could never have envisaged when she began The Crooked Snake (1955) in the small country town of Bonalbo in 1954, building upon the British tradition of the holiday adventure story. The growth since that time in diversity of theme and complexity of technique in children's literature has been particularly exciting in Australia because, as Wrightson explains in her Hans Christian Andersen Award acceptance speech, "Australian writers, with so small a body of work behind them, could feel that the country's literature was immediately in their hands. Every story that anyone could conceive was a new concept ... to be worked out in the writer's own way and for almost the first time" ("The Golden Apple" 3-4).

Such working out of increasingly demanding ideas in Australian children's literature raised problems similar to those encountered in Australian literature in general, and engendered similar solutions. Almost all Australian authors have been engaged in the same process and have worked within the same literary tradition; they have sought to develop an indigenous literature from transplanted European (primarily British) beginnings, and have done so in terms of the romanticism that came with their European literary heritage and was their major, enduring source of literary and philosophical ideas. Patricia Wrightson is no exception. She too has striven to write essentially Australian children's literature; her work since 1954 shows clear parallels to the Australian adult literary tradition, and deals with similar issues in similar ways. She shares the romantic presuppositions and conventions of other Australian authors, presenting the land as a source of healing and a place of learning through endurance, and using the natural and mystical associations of its indigenous people and their folklore to strengthen the bond between her characters and the land. As a children's writer, she has also been able to draw upon the work of her predecessors and contemporaries in children's literature to develop her own approach to the "new concepts" of her stories. In the process she has produced a body of writing distinguished by its range and its ambition, for she has attempted several types of prose fiction such as the holiday adventure, the animal story, science fiction, the teenage novel, and the short story. She has achieved her greatest success, however, by combining mainstream Australian romanticism with the fantasy that children's authors have brought to a high level of cultivation during the latter half of the twentieth century. This combination of romanticism and fantasy, together with her use of

Australian Aboriginal material, has enabled Wrightson to create her own version of what Peter Beatson calls "legend" -- fiction that portrays "the descent of the spirit of a people into their land" (64) -- and what Terry Goldie calls the literature of "indigenization" (13) -- fiction that seeks to bring the European inhabitants of such countries as Canada and Australia into imaginative contact with the land in which most of them were born, but in which, by comparison with its indigenous peoples, they are aliens.

The remainder of this chapter treats Patricia Wrightson's work as part of the Australian romantic literary tradition and examines her use of heroic fantasy to develop an indigenizing Australian "legend" that is also a description of the process of individuation. The chapters that follow examine the development of the characteristic elements of Wrightson's work in her first six novels; the burgeoning and synthesis of those elements in the fantasy of The Nargun and the Stars (1973); their innovative but strained extension in the indigenizing heroic fantasy of the Wirrun trilogy; and her return to brief, strongly localized novels containing such new departures as the use of animal and elderly human protagonists. The final chapter considers her techniques, characters, and themes as the work of an Australian author of children's literature, as well as such crucial matters as her use of Aboriginal material and her depiction of females and female experience.

The primacy of romanticism in Australian literature has historical and practical bases. As Vincent Buckley noted in 1959 in

"Towards an Australian Literature," the "whole of [the] development [of Australian literature] has taken place since the Romantic movement in English literature, and it has taken place in the shadow of that movement"(61). Further, Judith Wright explains in "Australian Poetry Since 1941," because "the English Romantic influence ... was perpetuated through [Australia's] education system in almost complete exclusion of any other nation's poetry," romanticism has been "influential ... in our attempts to transform a queer, end-of-the-earth landscape into something symbolically functional" (22). Australian by birth, education, and conviction, Patricia Wrightson, too, draws upon romanticism as a major source of ideas and literary conventions. Like many other Australian writers she is fascinated by the face of her country, both for its own sake and for what M.H. Abrams, writing in Natural Supernaturalism, calls "the verba visibilia, the symbolic language of the landscape" (104). In the process of making the landscape "symbolically functional," Wrightson faces the same three problems as her predecessors in Australian literature: to see a non-European landscape accurately and to describe it in terms that capture its antiquity and strangeness; to relate that landscape to the conscious and unconscious mind; and to establish some spiritual or psychological significance in the relationship between the landscape and its human inhabitants. Like such Australian authors as Patrick White and Randolph Stow, she chooses to face the problems of establishing an imaginative connection between Australians and their country in novels that bring together the two themes that Terry Goldie calls "individuation" and "indigenization" (222).

D.H. Lawrence describes the difficulty of seeing Australia through eyes conditioned by European experience in his novel Kangaroo, published in 1923, two years after Patricia Wrightson's birth. He muses upon the country's "oldness, with forms all worn low and blunt, squat" (86) and reflects upon the

> strange, as it were, invisible beauty of Australia, which is undeniably there, but which seems to lurk just beyond the range of our white vision. You feel you can't see -- as if your eyes hadn't the vision in them to correspond with the outside landscape. (87)

Australian-born writers like Wrightson, on the other hand, grew up in that landscape, and are well aware of the mystery and age of the Australian bush. More than that, many are strongly affected by it. Richard N. Coe's study of descriptions of Australian childhood leads him to assert that a common feature in the childhood of Australian-born writers is "a passionate, an overmastering love for the 'magic' and the mystery, for the haunting antiquity above all, the tangible 'timelessness' or 'agelessness' of the Australian bush" (135). For the Australian writer Rex Ingamells, the strangeness that an Englishman like Lawrence felt was actually an "Aboriginal power" (Elliott xxxiv), and certainly Lawrence used the image of the Aborigine in both of his reflections upon the strangeness and terror of the bushland in Kangaroo (19, 87). In the work of other Australian authors such as

Patrick White, Randolph Stow, and Patricia Wrightson, the centrality of the land also involves reference to its Aboriginal people.

It is one thing to love the landscape of one's homeland, however, and another thing to write of it convincingly. When Lawrence wrote Kangaroo European Australian writers, especially poets, had been grappling for a century with the problem of assimilating the age and strangeness of the continent into literature, and would continue the process for another half century and more. Like them, Patricia Wrightson had to learn to see the colours and shapes and vegetation of the oldest continent and to set her observations down, a process of development aided by the work of her predecessors and contemporaries.

Among her predecessors, Charles Harpur provides a clear example of learning to see the landscape. Writing in the 1850s, more than half a century after the beginnings of European settlement, Harpur describes mountains suggestive of the range near which he lived, but his image is vague and not necessarily Australian. In "The Creek of the Four Graves" he writes of "wild wolds clouded up with brush/ And cut with marshes perilously deep" (6-7), beneath "unknown mountains, that like ramparts towered" (11), "[t]heir rough enormous backs deep-fleeced with wood" (29). "Wolds" and "marshes" are incongruously English, and the mountains could be almost anywhere. In the same poem, however, he conveys one aspect of the landscape, the dark, hair-like foliage of casuarinas fringing a watercourse, when he writes with the exact observation of the native-born about

> upward tapering feathery swamp oaks,
> The sylvan eyelash always of remote
> Australian waters. (20-22)

Wrightson shows a similar development in exactitude of description. In her first novel, The Crooked Snake, she describes a country road in terms that do little to convey either the colour and texture of the landscape or the attitude of the perceiver:

> The road began to rise to the quarry hill, but the Society swung off to the left onto the rutted, broken surface of the Gorge road, where pot-holes and ruts slowed them down. The road met Gorge Creek, and the two wound on together up the narrow corridor of the Gorge. Behind fences on each side of the road, cattle browsed in the deep, winter-browned native grass; and beyond the paddocks rugged hills walled them in. (21)

In The Nargun and the Stars, her eighth novel, she offers colour, texture, the attitude of the perceiver, and a recreation of the scenes of a journey over a country road through the use of a cinematic series of phrases:

> It was a long drive from the station, on a road that sometimes broke into astonishing colours: patches of turquoise or fuchsia gravel, banks that glowed coral-red in the sun. Flocks of grey cockatoos swept up from the

> road, turning to clouds of pink as they rose ... Tall hills and ridges advanced and retreated, turned about and changed places, in a great, slow Morris dance. High rocks and shadowy hollows hung with blue; green humps and ridges; slopes the colour of hay or moonlight; the frown of forests. (18)

Turning a clearly described landscape into verba visibilia, however, requires a means of linking landscape to the perceiving mind. From the beginning, Australian writers have accepted the tenets of romantic idealism, especially as propounded by Wordsworth, and even in 1956, just as Patricia Wrightson had begun to publish her work, A.D. Hope could write in "Standards in Australian Literature" that "[t]he shade of Wordsworth haunts our poets" (42). Charles Harpur openly acknowledges his debt in his sonnet "Wordsworth's Poetry":

> How much, O Wordsworth! in this world how much
> Has thy surpassing love made rich for me
> Of what was once unprized! (1-3)

While Harpur's acceptance of Wordsworth's vision of nature begins a kind of romantic literary orthodoxy in Australia, his own Christian orthodoxy is unusual. Patricia Wrightson's work is typical of Australian literature because she draws upon a more secular romanticism that tends, in Abrams' words, "to eliminate ... the role of God, leaving as the prime agencies man and the world, mind and nature, the ego and the non-ego, the self and the not-self, spirit and the other, or ... subject and object" (91). For Wrightson, as for her romantic predecessors, realization of the relationship between these two "prime agencies" is crucially important, and such realization requires that she consider opposing aspects of the relationship: on the one hand, the individual's awareness of connection to the world; on the other hand, the individual's awareness of separation from the world.

Wrightson frequently uses a Wordsworthian technique to connect the perceiving mind to the landscape, and Abrams' comments on The Prelude apply equally to many of Wrightson's novels, in which she, like Wordsworth, deliberately depicts main characters "alone in an open prospect, responding in spirit to the attributes and alterations of the landscape, and ... made aware of a new stage in ... growth by coming to a new accounting with the natural scene" (92). In her third novel, The Rocks of Honey (1960), Wrightson uses two such scenes of main characters "in an open prospect," both scenes in which characters become aware of a new stage in growth. The first is set on a ridge at sunset, with the two main characters sitting apart, gazing up at the tall rocks of an Aboriginal sacred site. The unimaginative, white Barney, whose unconscious racial prejudice has been depicted earlier in the novel, becomes aware of the antiquity of Aboriginal occupation of the land, wondering about the long-dead Aborigine who made a stone axe and hid it among the rocks, and speculating about "what reasons beyond his understanding had moved the brown man to do it" (80). At the same time the Aboriginal boy Eustace derives the strengthening he needs from a feeling of almost physical unity with the land: "'It's my own pulse,' he thought, but he pressed his open hand down upon the warm earth. His hand seemed to know, deep, deep down, a slow and ponderous beat" (81). The second scene is the culmination of the novel: Eustace climbs to the Rocks of Honey to return the stone axe that symbolizes, for him, his sense of inferiority and alienation, and in the process finds "new knowledge and peace" (175).

The "open prospect" in this latter case, that of a mist-filled valley at dawn, is frequently used in romantic writing. (For example, after borrowing the scene from James Beattie's The Minstrel of 1771, Wordsworth reworks it four times: twice as a dawn scene, in the original Descriptive Sketches of 1793 and in its revised version, and twice as a moonlit scene in the final book of The Prelude of 1805 and that of 1850). In Wrightson's use of the scene, as in The Prelude, "the symbolic language of the landscape" becomes verba audibilia. Eustace sits "upright on the rock for a moment, gazing over the quiet valley and the rising mist," while a "wind-sound" in the stillness seems "to form words" in his mind, "like a giant whispering" (174), words that become verse summing up the theme of the novel: that with the passage of time the land itself will bring Aboriginal and European Australians together.

Simon, the central character of The Nargun and the Stars, experiences two similar moments of insight, in both cases "alone in an open prospect" above Wongadilla, the land to which he now feels he belongs. The first moment gives him an intuitive understanding of the brevity of human life relative to the life of an earth he can now conceive as a whole:

> He sat there eating his apple and feeling the strength of the mountain surging behind him. He felt the earth rolling on its way through the sky, and rocks and trees clinging to it, and seas and strands of rivers pressed to it, and flying birds caught in its net of air .... People might come and go, he thought, but [the Potkoorok and the Turongs] belonged here; and he thought they had belonged here always .... Simon could not have explained it, but he knew it. (61-2)

The second moment, experienced in the same place, gives him a sense of his individuality and responsibility for his actions:

> All about lay the spinning world with the dark forests riding it and strands of creek and river clinging to it and birds netted in its clear, cold air .... He stood up again and spoke ... "I'm Simon Brent, if anyone wants to know. And where my name is, I put it there." (108)

In two of these four instances Wrightson emphasizes the fact that Eustace and Simon are acquiring new understanding by depicting each boy eating an apple, a traditional symbol of knowledge or wisdom (Cooper 14).

Variants of the same scene characterize Wrightson's work, even in urban settings such as that of I Own the Racecourse! (1968).

Her children and young adults experience moments of connection with their surroundings, moments of intense awareness through which they are strengthened, healed, or given a new understanding of themselves and their place in the world. Wordsworth describes such moments in the eleventh book of the 1805 Prelude:

> There are in our existence spots of time,
> Which with distinct preeminence retain
> A renovating virtue, whence ...
>
> ....
>
> our minds
> Are nourished and invisibly repaired --
> A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
> That penetrates, enables us to mount
> When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen ...
>
> ....
>
> Such moments, worthy of all gratitude,
> Are scattered everywhere, taking their date
> From our first childhood -- in our childhood even
> Perhaps are most conspicuous. (257-59, 263-67, 273-76)

Yet underlying the apparent certainty of the moment of insight is a fear that such insight may be self-deception. While we may believe that, as Wordsworth says in "Tintern Abbey,"

> with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,

> We see into the life of things. (47-48)

we may be deluding ourselves. There may be no real connection between the individual and nature, and whatever we experience in the revelatory moment may be the product of our own minds. It may be as Coleridge says, that

> we receive but what we give,
> And in our life alone doth Nature live;
> Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
> ("Dejection: An Ode." 47-49)

Australian writers have also explored the other aspect of the relationship between the prime agencies of mind and nature: the individual's consciousness of separation from the world. Such consciousness appears in two guises: first, that of the inability of the self to know more than the self, and second, that of the inability of individuals to communicate their experience of self-hood. The Australian poet Christopher Brennan, writing in 1904, a century after Coleridge and half a century after Harpur, considers, in his theoretical writings as well as in his verse, the proposition that the self is the sole ground of knowledge. Though Brennan believes that man and nature can achieve "complete interaction" through imagination, such completeness is beyond the power of the individual and requires "nothing less than the whole cosmic time-process for its perfection" ("Symbolism in Nineteenth Century Literature" 75, 76). Having evolved within nature, the individual cannot truly understand it. Rather, "the one principle of unity which saves us from being altogether lost in the chaos of appearances, outer and inner," is that of "the unity of self" ("Symbolism" 77). As Brennan writes in "The Twilight of Disquietude,"

> What do I know? myself alone
> a gift of uncreated night, (42, 1-2)

and this individual self cannot communicate with other individuals.

The problem of communication is still haunting A.D. Hope in 1943. "The Wandering Islands" begins:

> You cannot build bridges between the wandering
> islands,
> The Mind has no neighbours, and the unteachable heart
> Announces its armistice time after time, but spends
> Its love to draw them closer and closer apart. (1-4)

In many of her novels Patricia Wrightson explores these two implications of solipsism, that of perception and that of communication, either as central concerns or as important issues. As well as describing the romantic moment of growth through communion with the world, Wrightson describes the moment of growth in which individuals perceive their own isolation, in the process leaving behind the unreflective joy of childhood or the unthinking joy of unexamined love.

Lindy, the central character of The Feather Star (1962), is leaving childhood behind, and in a moment of insight, gazing at the stars, she becomes aware of herself "perched dizzily on the brink of the spinning world, hurtling through lonely light years in space" (87).

While she and Bill share a comforting sense of the continuity of life, both have lost the unreflective absorption of children like Lindy's young brother Chris and his friend Annie. Lindy also becomes aware of the isolation of others, feeling "a sharp distress for Abel," the miserable old man of the novel, and discovering that her feeling is pity (173). Similarly Eustace in The Rocks of Honey learns that he must face the pain of his circumstances alone: "No one [can] hinder him in this, or help him very much, for a man is his own responsibility and no one else's" (175). Simon, in The Nargun and the Stars, shares Lindy's pity for loneliness when he considers the Nargun, a creature closely identified with himself. Again Wrightson uses the image of "staring at the sky" to lead into the moment of vision:

> That granite face turned to the sky seemed to bear all age, all emptiness, all evil and good; without hope or despair; with rock-like patience. He was shaken by a sudden storm of pity and fear (134).

Simon's fear stems from the fact that this isolated, lonely stone literally has his name on it: like the Nargun, he too must endure with patience. Wirrun and Murra, in Behind the Wind (1981), realize that with the gift of self, which takes from Murra the unconscicusness of "a ripple on the water," come other "gifts of cold and hunger and old age and death," but also the incapacity even of lovers to communicate the experience of self-hood: they sit "apart in their separate silences," each "suddenly alone" (25).

The problem of communication between individuals is central to three of Wrightson's four novels set in the inner city: *Down to Earth* (1965), *I Own the Racecourse!*, and *Night Outside* (1979). Martin, the visitor from outer space in *Down to Earth*, explains on three occasions that an individual can never know what others perceive, since "[w]e are locked away inside our separate nervous systems, and we can't show each other the impressions in our minds." Nor does language help: "We borrow from each other the words we use, but what do the words mean? We agree that this is a green leaf, and that this is a red rose; but what *are* those things in your mind and mine?" (184). Even the sense of touch cannot help: Martin may look human, but the touch of his hands feels like the brush of leaves on the skin, not a human contact (189).

The boys in *I Own the Racecourse!* face the problem of communicating to the mentally handicapped Andy Hoddel the complexities of ownership and of the distinction between play and reality. They fail in both endeavours, but begin in the process to question the meaning of ownership themselves as they come to a limited understanding of the differences between Andy's mind and their own, of the differences among their own views of reality, and of the value of Andy's innocent, immediate vision of things. Wrightson examines the issue of the perception of reality again in *Night Outside*, using eccentric characters, including the Cat Lady first glimpsed in *Down to Earth*, to explain the isolation of individuality. As Cedric says, "Wherever you are, that's the end of the world. Whenever it is, that's Eternity" (50).

Wrightson's depiction of moments of conscious connection with and separation from the world places her, along with the original romantics and their many modern followers, among

> the heirs of a very old and expanding tradition -- pagan and Christian, mythical and metaphysical, religious and secular -- that it is the lot of man to be fragmented and cut off, but haunted in his exile by the presentiment of a lost condition of wholeness and community.
>
> (Abrams 313)

For many romantic writers, including Wrightson, early childhood is the time preceding exile, a time, as Wordsworth calls it in his "Intimations Ode,"

> when meadow, grove, and stream,
> The earth, and every common sight,
> ... did seem
> Apparelled in celestial light,
> The glory and the freshness of a dream. (1-5)

Along with Rousseau, Wordsworth, Blake, and many others, Wrightson regards early childhood as a time of uncomplicated, unselfconscious union with the world, as she shows in her depiction of young children in The Feather Star, especially by juxtaposing their lives and concerns with those of the adolescent characters. The restoration to adults and older children of that sense of wholeness, of the communion of mind and nature, requires the establishment of some spiritual or psychological relationship between such individuals and the world they inhabit.

One solution to that problem of separation is to learn from a culture that has preserved a harmony with nature like that of the child. Abrams describes the romantic view that draws a parallel between the development of cultures and the development of the child into the greater complexity of adult life as

> Rousseau's paradox of civilization: that human progress in intellection and in the sciences, arts, and social institutions, after an early optimal stage, involves a correlative decline in human happiness by imposing a growing burden of complication, conflict, oppression, and instinctual renunciation. (199)

Some Australian writers proposed that Aboriginal culture afforded a means of restoring a unifying spiritual relationship between European Australians and their country. Such writers turned back to a belief in a Golden Age, a mythical Aboriginal Dreamtime in which man lived in harmony with the natural world and with his neighbours; they advocated, in the present day, an uncompromising Australian nationalism and a rejection of merely commercial values.

Another solution to the problem is to present the individual's achievement of wholeness as an interior journey of self-discovery and self-formation. Some Australian writers sought to establish a psychological relationship between man and the world by presenting man's experience of self-discovery as a difficult, often painful and fatal journey into the interior of the country through a landscape that both forms and mirrors psychological states. Wrightson's novels, especially those of the Wirrun trilogy, use both of these approaches to restoring man's "lost condition of wholeness," and her work shows parallels with that of her immediate predecessors in Australian literature such as the Jindyworobaks, Patrick White, and Randolph Stow.

During the 1940s and early 1950s a group of writers led by Rex Ingamells sought to reject, on behalf of Australian-born Europeans, the feeling of strangeness described by Lawrence in Kangaroo, and to reconstitute the bond between man and nature, by joining themselves to "the only true and sincere Australian culture ... that of the Aboriginal race" (Elliott 232). Using the name "Jindyworobak," meaning "to join or link up" (Elliott 232), they proclaimed the union between Aboriginal culture and the land in terms strongly echoed by Patricia Wrightson thirty years later: "The folk lore of the Aborigines ... was not something imposed upon an environment; it was the natural consequence of that environment" (Elliott 232).

In "Would I Might Find My Country" Roland Robinson, another Jindyworobak writer and the source of some of Wrightson's Aboriginal folklore, expresses a romantic envy of the Aborigines' unity with the land that vindicates Herbert Piper's assertion that Jindyworobak beliefs are "a remarkable example of the longevity of Romantic ideas in Australia" (50):

> Would I might find my country as the blacks
> come in and lean their spears up in the scrub
>
> ………………………………………………………………………
>
> Would I might find my people as the blacks
> sit with their lubras, children and tired dogs
>
> ………………………………………………………………………
>
> and talk in quiet calling voices while
> the blood-deep crimson flower of sunset burns
> in smouldering ash and fume behind the trees,
> behind the thin grassed ridges of their land
> that is their home wherever they may camp.
> (1-2, 6-7, 11-15)

Robinson is also, however, expressing the desire of white Australians to find a home in the country of their birth or adoption. His poem is an example of a process described by Terry Goldie:

> In their need to become "native," to belong here, whites in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia have adopted a process which I have termed "indigenization." A peculiar word, it suggests the impossible necessity of becoming indigenous. For many writers, the only chance for indigenization seemed to be through writing about the humans who are truly indigenous, the Inuit, Indians, Maori, and Aborigines (13).

The Jindyworobaks were passionate and sometimes wrong-headed indigenizers, whose romanticism was as European as their audience. Brian Elliott, compiler and editor of The Jindyworobaks, makes this point clearly when he explains that they were "missionaries" seeking to change the attitudes of white Australians to their homeland, not authors seeking "to write Aboriginal history or to propound Aboriginal law or morality, or even to describe Aboriginal culture" (xxi). Further, in following their essentially romantic program, the Jindyworobaks, and Wrightson after them, had to create an Aborigine that an indifferent white Australia would accept: in Healy's words, "[n]ot the contemporary Aborigine, not even a plausible historical one, but the sort of creature that might persuade a white Australia to look in the direction of the surviving race" (173). Like the Jindyworobaks, Wrightson creates a romantic Aborigine and, simultaneously, the intractable dilemma that such an "impossible necessity" entails: on the one hand, she avoids the "emphatic absence" caused by ignoring the indigene, but on the other hand inevitably fails to create an "indigene as subject liberated from past economies" (Goldie 222). Wrightson's Aboriginal spirits are at the same time expressions of "natural supernaturalism" and embodiments of the "commodities -- sex, violence, orality, mysticism, the prehistoric --" that Goldie argues are important elements within "the semiotic field of the indigene" (19). The "prehistoric" within this field is self-explanatory; "sex" involves presentation of the female as "perfect temptress and perfect terror" (84); "violence" involves both physical brutality (89) and rape (86); "orality" involves the importance of the spoken rather than the written word in presenting an "essential dynamism, a phenomenological presence of life" (108); "mysticism" involves "the spiritual consciousness of the alien Other, that essence which seems beyond capture by a white semiosis" (127).

Wrightson's traditional Aboriginal society is a model of harmony and observance of law in a Golden Age, and her Aboriginal man is a child of nature. Her view of white society is, like that of the Jindyworobaks, shaped by the land, seen either as the environment that will effect the eventual indigenization of all Australians, or as the source of the wisdom and enduring values of both the Aborigines and rural white Australians, the "Inlanders" of the Wirrun trilogy .

Wrightson's and the Jindyworobaks' view of the world of traditional Aboriginal society exemplifies what Abrams calls "Rousseau's nostalgia for a unified life in which man is in complete harmony with himself and with other men" (199). While admitting the idealistic nature of such a view, Elliott explains that to the Jindyworobaks

> the tribal life of the Aborigines, politically ordered by a rule of democratic custom and mutual consent and spiritually controlled by the mythological authority of the Alchera [Dreamtime], seemed to constitute the kind of perfect human community which nothing in the inherited white civilization could equal (xxvi).

Such a community appeared in children's literature when in 1952 Rex Ingamells published Aranda Boy, a novel depicting the Aranda before contact with Europeans as a happy, altruistic, and orderly aggregation of family groups ruled by "kindly Old Men" (94). Ingamells presents the hopeful argument that sympathetic Europeans and co-operative aborigines could together ensure the survival of Aranda ways. Eight years later Patricia Wrightson's portrayal in The Rocks of Honey of Aboriginal life before European contact is even more idealized. Warrimai and his family live in a society founded on altruism, co-operation, and duty (85); each of its members has a clearly-defined role, from the children who learn "their lessons with enjoyment" (66) to elders who "care for" the land "in the ceremonies" (87). Tom Gordon tells of the "secret bora grounds, where laws were made, teachings given, law-breakers tried and executed" (66), of the religious ceremonies in which "the clans chanted their responses so that it sounded like a service in a cathedral" (67). It is a "different world -- alive, laughing, stern, and very full of magic" (67), a timeless world like that of European pastoral literature, set in a country "beautiful as it will not be again," a land "full of life and food and water" (Rocks 82).

In the contemporary setting of the Wirrun trilogy Wrightson also concentrates on the positive side of Aboriginal ways and values. In The Rocks of Honey she led the way, in Australian children's literature, in describing the racism that affects the lives of most Aboriginal people, but in the Wirrun trilogy she alludes only in passing to the realities of existence "in shanties on the edges of towns" (Behind the Wind 33), and compares Aboriginal solidarity, spirituality, and dignity with the competitiveness, materialism, and childishness of urban, white Australians. Against the white "world of money and jobs and flats" she sets a "world of freedom and the old ways" of the Aborigines (The Dark Bright Water [1978] 223) -- the Edenic, pastoral existence that Wirrun and Murra share in the opening sections of Behind the Wind and again at the close of that novel. Against the greedy hedonism of urban whites she sets the "stern" code of Aborigines who would not tolerate "so primitive and destructive a happiness" (The Ice is Coming [1977] 30), and in the same novel she contrasts the "worry" and "frenzy" of urban life with life in "the land in its quiet places" (89, 90) as enjoyed by traditional Aborigines.

Wrightson's Aborigines are "natural" human beings used to present the possibility of nature in a human form, or of humans as close to nature as humankind can come (Goldie 19). Her "People," as the creations of an indigenizing author, have an innate, physical connection to the country: "they belong to the land; it flows into them through their feet" (Ice 11). Though Wirrun is an uninitiated city-dweller, his Aboriginality leads him naturally and inexplicably to care for the land and enables him to see its spiritual manifestations. Eustace, in The Rocks of Honey, is a child of mixed race whose inner conflict is caused by the refusal of his unadaptive, "cold white" heritage to accept the natural power of his Aboriginality. This very Aboriginality, however, enables him to "hear" the land's promise that it "would fashion its people, all of them, to its own shape in its own good time" (175).

Further, Wrightson's "People" are literally children of the land, having been formed by the land to care for it and for its other inhabitants in an intimate and unconditional, rather than a conventional way:

> The hills -- the sky -- the sea -- anyone could care for those.
>
> He said, "There's a dung-beetle by that log. I care for that. And there's a rotten toadstool with a worm in it: I care for both of 'em. I care for that bit of fern, and the little white men by the sea, and the horse-thing in the night. I care for the ice and the fire." (_Ice_ 57)

Even so, the relationship between Wirrun and the land is essentially a romantic, European one. His location when he speaks these words (on Ko-in's mountain), and his attachment to the tiny lives of the dung-beetle, toadstool, and worm, owe more to the Wordsworthian moment of imaginative insight and to Blake's "Auguries of Innocence" than to the intensely local relationship between traditional Aborigines and the land. Brian Elliott's words apply as much to Wrightson as to the Jindyworobaks when he describes their response to the land "as a broad, pervasive influence, an atmosphere" (xxx). On the other hand,

> as the Aborigines understood it, [relationship to the land] came down to specific detail. Every location, every feature of the visible landscape was inhabited with

> mystical, mythical and totemistic presences -- places where mythical events had occurred, where the wandering ancestors had rested, and (of vivid importance to individuals) spots where the quickening had occurred which first identified them as the living unborn and assigned them to their totems. (Elliott xxx)

Wrightson's presentation of the Aborigines as caring for the land is also romantic. Since the spirits of the land lack human feeling they do not share the "People's" attitude to the land:

> If [the spirits] were the right kind they might help when help was needed. They might be and know and remember and do; but men cared even when they could not do. Only the earth itself knew what good that was -- some cord that the earth had twisted and used to bind its creatures together. (Ice 132)

Such a notion of caring does not, however, reflect an anthropological view of the Aborigines' "active participation in the ecosystem" as outlined by Deborah Bird Rose (384). "All humans 'artfully' rearrange nature to suit their desires or perceived needs," as Goldie points out (20), and the Aborigines have been no exception during their long occupation of Australia. Still, Wrightson's view of Aboriginal "care" for the land and its creatures is unsurprising, given her place in the romantic Australian tradition, and readily explicable, too, given the paucity and recency of knowledge about Aboriginal relationship to the land. As Rose explains:

> There is a great deal to be learnt about 'the facts' that Aboriginal people have observed, and more to be learnt about their managerial strategies. There is even more to be learnt of the cultural construction of the environment, for it is through moral and ontological systems that Aboriginal people have achieved and sustained their skilled ecological management strategies. (384-85)

The groundwork of such learning has begun to appear in the anthropological research of such writers as Dorothy Tunbridge and Rose herself since Wrightson published the Wirrun trilogy.

Wrightson's use of the figures and the stories of Aboriginal folklore is also like that of the Jindyworobaks. As Elliott says, "they were never scientists, and their use of material was always directed to literary ends" (xxi); Wrightson's use of Aboriginal material, some of it derived from the Jindyworobak Roland Robinson and his friend Bill Harney, is eclectic and purely literary. She makes no claim to scientific accuracy; rather, she specifically disclaims it in "The Square Professionalist," denying the belief "that in order to draw on the fairies and monsters of Aboriginal folklore [she is] doing a lot of learned and valuable research."

> Not true, I am afraid. Every spirit I have used in a story or recorded on my cards has already been put on record by people better equipped. I have done some combing and collecting, that is all. It can be slow and laborious, and I suppose it might count as a sort of secondary

> research, but anyone can do it with the help of almost any library. (7)

Wrightson's "fairies" derive their power from a range of sources. Their indigenizing power comes principally from their association with the semiotic field of the indigene, either directly (through appearance, language, or custom) or indirectly, through embodiment of some of the "standard commodities in which the indigene takes part" (Goldie 19), such as violence or unrepressed sexuality. Many of the male spirit figures, especially those in the Wirrun trilogy such as the Dulugar (Ice 129), Ko-yo-rowen (Ice 49), the Pungalunga (Water (63), and Wulgaru (Wind 146) are violent, even cannibalistic; many of the female characters of the trilogy such as the Bagini (Ice 156), the Mungga-mungga (Water 79), the Abuba (Water 103), and the Yunggamurra (Water 164) combine flagrant sexual enticement and possibly mortal danger.

Wrightson's "fairies" are also, however, expressions of the European romantic view that Carlyle termed "Natural Supernaturalism" (Sartor Resartus 293). While they are drawn from Aboriginal sources, they are used to support a European romantic pantheism and a vision of unfallen nature to replace the Christian world view.

The "fairies" derived from Aboriginal folklore appear first in An Older Kind of Magic (1972) as a plot device and as a means of depicting the Aboriginal continuity of the land beneath the concrete and asphalt of the city. In The Nargun and the Stars and A Little Fear

(1983), however, the creatures have become a further connection between chosen human beings and the land. In Abrams' terms they are verba visibilia, since, like the Njimbin or the Hairy Man, they resemble such natural features as rocks and vegetation. But they are verba audibilia too, since they connect the characters to the landscape through talk that reflects the natural features they represent: the Potkoorok with a voice "like lapping water" (42), the Turongs with a "a voice like leaves" (97), the Nyols with "voices" that "[rumble] like stones" (112).

In the Wirrun trilogy and Balyet (1989), many of the heroic and dangerous spirits of the land are not tied so closely to nature by appearance, but are mystical expressions of the land that are "recognized by the only slightly less indigenous Aborigines" (Goldie 136) and, in the case of Jo Murray of Balyet, by their descendants, but not by whites. Wrightson confers creative power upon the land itself; as she explains in the "Author's Note" to The Dark Bright Water, she postulates her own "first things" in the world of the trilogy, avoiding the use of sacred Aboriginal creation stories by inventing material she believes to be consonant with traditional sources. Wrightson uses the figure of Wulgaru to present a view of a fallen world (Wind 77) and to reject it, for Wulgaru, a creature of power, is made by man from man's own guilt.

Wrightson's expression of relationship to the land through its spirit creatures is, therefore, a European, literary one, not that of traditional Aboriginal people. It is probably beyond the capacity of

Europeans to write about the Aboriginal world-view in European literary forms, or even to understand that world-view fully. So closely associated are Aboriginal stories and particular areas of the land that in an Aboriginal language such as Yura Ngawarla "'telling (someone) a story', yarta wandatha, means simply 'telling (someone) the land (yarta)', or 'linking (that someone) to the land'" (Tunbridge xxxv). The traditional stories of each Aboriginal group in its particular part of the country serve many functions, often simultaneously. Such stories may give the history of a location, account for the origins of natural phenomena, map the landscape, categorize geographical knowledge, record boundaries, collect environmental knowledge, account for the origins of social institutions and customs, provide a rubric for rituals, offer guidelines to social and moral values, embody warnings to transgressors of rules, offer encouragement in the face of difficulties, entertain listeners, and act as a focus of community identity (Tunbridge xxxvii-xxxix). The attraction of this richness of application for indigenizing writers is obvious, but their own European culture makes direct use of such material impossible.

The land is, however, far more than a setting in the European literary tradition of Australia, as Graeme Turner points out:

> In the pattern of representation that critics have detected in our fiction ... the keynotes are those of the harshness and indifference of the land, and thus the difficulty of surviving on it; the compensations lie in the assertion of a unique natural beauty, in the discovery of a certain

> spirituality in communion with the land, or in the mastery of the stoical, pioneering virtues of endurance and acceptance. (28)

Wrightson's stance in depicting white Australian society shows many affinities with that tradition, in its broad outlines as well as in its expressions in the work of the Jindyworobaks.

In The Rocks of Honey Wrightson metaphorically links aboriginal and white Australians to the land in a way that reflects Jindyworobak belief in the importance of the adaptation of all Australians to their country. She establishes that link in romantic terms; Eustace "almost" feels the heartbeat of the land during one moment of insight (81), and during another seems to hear words in the "wind-sound," words expressing the belief that the land will "bend and shape the cold white people" and thereby end the division between Aboriginal and white Australians. In the Wirrun trilogy Wrightson is less sanguine about the likelihood of the land's unifying the Australian people. Rather, she presents Australia's inhabitants as three races ranked in order of indigenization and spiritual wholeness determined by their response to the land: "simply and gratefully caring about it; exploiting it and perhaps learning to care; and theorizing about its value. The carers, the users, the theorists. The People, the Inlanders, the Happy Folk" ("The Square Professionalist" 6).

Both People and Inlanders are separated from the urban majority because of their relationship to the land; the indigenous People because they know it naturally, and the Inlanders because "the great old silent land that claims the People for its own has been at work on the Inlanders too" (Ice 12). While their dispossession of the Aborigines has caused "a deep bitterness between the Inlanders and the People," the Inlanders have a love of the land that ensures that "their realities [are] real" to Aborigines (Ice 29). The Inlanders' sense of reality, and their spiritual wholeness, however, are founded in the romantic, nationalist belief in the value of endurance that has informed much of Australian literary history. They are the inhabitants that Rex Ingamells wanted for Australia:

> a race whose active blood
> will mutter the white light of her limestone rocks,
> whose blood will riot with the unreserved
> rage of the red light of her sandstone ridges,
> whose minds will know the strong communion
> of midday hush, of tree-entangled stars.
> ("The Gangrened People" 139-44)

On the other hand, Wrightson's materialistic Happy Folk, interested in "more impressionable peoples over the sea" (Ice 29) rather than in People and Inlanders, resemble the city-dwellers of the same Ingamells poem, living under the influence of foreigners

> exploiting us for money, money, money,
> spreading the itch to purchase every day,
> filling our hearts with fatal loyalties
> to notions not our own, nor suited to us. (124-27)

Childish, selfish, given to ephemeral fads and capable only of ephemeral friendships, "the little white men by the sea" turn away from the continent because, like their fellows in Ian Mudie's "This is Australia," they

> fear it, being so small and petty-mean
> that never in their hearts is courage great enough
> for them to love its beauty and immensity. (58-60)

Such rejection of the city is not peculiar to Wrightson or the Jindyworobaks; rather, it is the norm in a literature saturated with romantic pastoralism. While Australian cities have gathered the vast majority of the population, and the average Australian has become what Bruce Dawe calls "Homo Suburbiensis," Australian writers, even the socialist-realists who dominated fiction until the late 1950s, proclaimed the values of pastoral simplicity at the expense of those of the city. A.D. Hope, in "Australia," goes beyond the distaste of his predecessors to disgust, describing the five main coastal cities as "teeming sores" (21), "parasite robber-state[s]" (22) in which "second-hand Europeans pullulate" (23). Seventeen years later, in 1956, he noted that despite "a highly industrialized modern society, a thoroughly urbanized way of life," Australia had "a literature that is largely concerned with life on the land and pays very little attention to life in the cities and large towns" ("Standards in Australian Literature" 41).

Romanticism, too, explains a further aspect of Australian literature that Hope notes in the same essay: its predilection for what

Wordsworth, in a letter to John Wilson in 1802, called "men in low conditions of society" (Letters 1: 354). "The 'real' Australian in fiction," writes Hope, "more often than not tends to be a drover, a shearer, a small farmer, a wharf labourer, a factory hand" rather than a member of the professions or even a businessman, "unless these occupations are made romantic by an historical setting in the past" (42).

Wrightson's characters are "'real Australians" in Hope's terms. The majority of her adult characters belong to the large, amorphous lower middle class of Australia, or they are small farmers, fishermen, or members of the inner city working class. Apart from the generalized urban Happy Folk, the adult characters Wrightson presents as being greedy and ruthless are upper-class city-dwellers: the exploitative capitalist Wyvern of An Older Kind of Magic and the murderous Professor of Down to Earth. On the other hand, all the most admirable and helpful adult characters in her work have some direct connection to the land as an Aborigine, small-scale farmer or grazier, gardener, or fisherman. Characters in need of healing, such as Simon Brent, Wirrun, and Agnes Tucker, find it through withdrawal from the city into the countryside, and, in the cases of Simon and Wirrun, with the help of humble people who are in touch with the land. Even in the inner city, Andy Hoddel finds acceptance from the ordinary people who work among the horses and gardens of a racecourse that brings a touch of rural life into an urban setting. Only the wealthy and powerful, the committee members, object to Andy's belief that he "owns" the racecourse.

Wrightson knows that much of her writing belongs in that romantic, pastoral tradition of Australian literature, well worn though it may be, because critics of her early novels told her as much: "I discovered that my life, my friends, my background, my most intense experience, my very country itself, were all one large cliché" ("On Becoming Australian" 12). Only four of her fifteen novels are set in the city, and using the urban settings recommended by her advisers went against the grain of her work. "I couldn't always take the city quite seriously," she writes, and "it was the inhibition of the city that made the release of fantasy so important" because fantasy took her "back to the living land" ("Australian" 14) in search of Abrams' "lost condition of wholeness and community" (313).

Apart from a return to the natural simplicity of Aboriginal and rural life, there is, as noted earlier, a second way to attain wholeness: the undergoing of a process of self-discovery and self-formation that leads to the creation of a coherent identity. As a children's author, Wrightson has followed her predecessors in adult and children's literature in depicting that process, especially in her fantasy novels. As an Australian writer, she has followed her Australian predecessors in objectifying the process, at a conscious and unconscious level, as a literal journey to the interior of the land. The notion of self-formation leads, in literature, "to the distinctive Romantic genre of the Bildungsgeschichte" (Abrams 96), the history of personal development that has produced some of the major adult novels of the twentieth century and has also, with the enormous growth and extension of education since the nineteenth century, become a staple of children's literature. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Wordsworth's description of the growth of self in *The Prelude* offers an alternative to "the painful process of Christian conversion and redemption," replacing it with "a painful process of self-formation, crisis, and self-recognition, which culminates in a stage of self-coherence, self-awareness, and assured power that is its own reward" (Abrams 96). In an increasingly secular age, authors writing for children as well as those writing for adults have followed Wordsworth in turning away from the depiction of Christian conversion or the *peregrinatio vitae* towards the depiction of self-formation that sometimes occupies a whole lifetime.

Historically, the *Bildungsgeschichte* in adult literature has left its protagonist on the point of entering adult life. Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* leaves its central character on the threshold of adulthood, having completed a painfully frank process of self-recognition and a morally unsparing process of self-formation, and ready to move on to the "assured power" of a self made aware and secure by the endurance of suffering. James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* also leaves its hero on the verge of manhood, having subjected family, nation, religion, and self to remorseless skepticism, but knowing his vocation as an artist committed to redeeming "both life and the world by recreating them into a new world" (Abrams 422). For the most part, children's novels have concentrated on a brief period of crisis and growth in the life of a child character, and Wrightson's are no exception; the majority of her works from The Bunyip Hole (1957) to Balyet have been of this type. In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, Wrightson, along with such children's authors as Lloyd Alexander and Ursula Le Guin, has followed Wordsworth in writing longer works that convert "the wayfaring Christian of the Augustinian spiritual journey into the self-formative traveler of the Romantic educational journey" (Abrams 284). Further, like Le Guin, she has written a long work encompassing her protagonist's entire life, going beyond her American counterpart in depicting the death and apotheosis of her hero. As a twentieth century author, Wrightson, like Le Guin, has also attempted to deal with a problem that Wordsworth could not fully understand -- that of describing the place of the unconscious mind within the developing self -- and has done so in the same way, by using fantasy.

Australian poets have been struggling with that problem since the beginning of this century. In "The Twilight of Disquietude" Brennan acknowledges the importance of the unconscious mind that is a part of nature and therefore not directly accessible to man, a being who has evolved within that same nature. Each individual is aware of

> The mother-deep, wise, yearning, bound ...
>
> ....
>
> But mighty hands have lock'd the keep
> and flung the key, long ages past:
> there lies no way into the deep
> that is myself, alone, aghast. (41.1, 9-12)

Brennan contended that literature rather than philosophy is the only guide to that "deep," for "poetry and imagination, alone, are the expression, adequate or not, of the vital reality" of a self comprising conscious and unconscious elements ("Symbolism" 81). From the 1930s onward other Australian poets followed Brennan's lead in exploring the self, many of them using the metaphor of the journey of discovery in the Australian landscape. The strangeness and harshness of that landscape bring together two themes often encountered in the literature of self-discovery, the ancient one of suffering, and the modern one of the unconscious mind.

In 1939, A.D. Hope "turns gladly home" to the

desert of the human mind,
Hoping, if still from deserts prophets come,

Such savage and scarlet as no green hills dare
Springs in that waste. ("Australia" 23-26)

In 1942 James McAuley advises his readers in the opening lines of "Terra Australis" to

Voyage within you, on the fabled ocean,
And you will find that Southern Continent,

"a land of similes," reassuring at first, then increasingly apocalyptic. Francis Webb's "Eyre All Alone" (1961) brings mind and landscape into a tortured synthesis:

Prickly ethics of scrub and dwarf tea-tree:
My mind's blank deserted tableland

> Has, therefore, root and action.
> I think a drab mendicant green against sun-burst;
> I have conned Being, quaked in its hundred degrees;
> I moralize upon legless vortices of sand;
> I taste brewed liquors of refraction:
> But thirst is the logician, thirst. (Section 2, "Water")

Webb adds in a note to the poem: "My insistence upon Eyre's aloneness... comes from seeing such a journey of discovery as suggestive of another which is common to us all" (Collected Poems 251).

In the late 1950s Australian novelists followed the poets on the romantic journey of psychic exploration in a movement that K.G. Hamilton calls "the end of the socialist-realist hegemony over Australian fiction" (14-15). At the time when Wrightson was beginning to publish, authors like Randolph Stow and Patrick White were using the journey to the interior as a means of establishing what Peter Beatson calls "legend" rather than "history":

> Legend is generated not by opening up new tracts of land for settlement or exploitation but by imaginative fusion of the soul of the nation with its country. This is a particularly relevant concept in a 'new' country like Australia, to whose primordial and intransigent forms the spirit of the whites has remained largely unwedded. The descent of the individual soul into the body must be paralleled by the descent of the spirit of a people into

> their land, experiencing completely its unknown content of beauty and terror. (64)

In the process Stow and White discovered that "an authentic consciousness trying to grasp the distinctive characteristics of European society in Australia would, sooner or later, find itself face to face with the Aborigine and the land" (Healy 173). The same can be said of the individual character on a journey of self-discovery, for "individuation is often joined by indigenization" (Goldie 46), as the central character achieves the union with the land that is natural among its Aboriginal inhabitants. Further, individuation involves suffering justified by the achievement of a maturity that accepts the simultaneous existence of good and evil in both the self and the world, and a rejection of the mediocrity and hedonism of white Australian society.

For Randolph Stow's Heriot in To The Islands (1958) Australia is the land in which he travels to find an analogue of his soul's "strange country"(204). At the end of his painful journey of self-discovery and indigenization in the company of the Aborigine Justin, Heriot dies, becoming a part of the land like the Aborigines whose bones surround him. Patrick White's Voss (1957) is ambitious to enter the "vast expectant country," arrogantly sure that nobody else has "explored his own mind to the extent that would enable him to bear such experience" (146). After Voss has met his death at the hands of the Aboriginal boy Jackie, he becomes a part of the land and of

Aboriginal belief, for "if you live and suffer long enough in a place, you do not leave it altogether" (472).

The journeys of Stow's Heriot and White's Voss bring both men into contact with the land in the manner described by Wordsworth in Book 12 of the 1805 Prelude: through the two influences of "emotion" and "calmness" (1,2), "peace and excitation" (9) produced by the tranquil and the sublime aspects of nature. Stow's Heriot enjoys the grasslands of the interior of Western Australia, and in Wordsworthian fashion feels "peace rise like a wind from the plain" (108). In the end, however, he comes to the sublime and the strange: "to the edge of the cliffs, where they [drop], vast red walls, to the faraway sea below" (203). Pastoral peace can affect even the suspicious and arrogant Voss, but he too comes to his end in an extreme landscape of dust, skeleton trees, and fearful heat; above him in the night a comet travels sublimely, a "quick wanderer, almost transfixed by distance in that immeasurable sky" (402).

In addition to this traditional romantic contact with nature, however, Stow and White use what Goldie calls the "natural" and "mystical" associations of the Aborigines to establish even closer links with the land. Both writers accept that Aborigines belong to Australia in a way that Europeans cannot, and "view indigenous religion as a positive emanation of nature" (Goldie 132). The European characters of both authors develop affinities with the land and a kind of pantheism as they grow towards selfhood. Stow's Heriot, literally enclosed in the land, learns to see his soul as "a strange country"

(204) and to look forward to death in Aboriginal terms as a journey to the islands; White's Frank Le Mesurier combines Aboriginal and Christian notions of immortality:

> I pray that you will take my spirit out of this my body's remains, and after you have scattered it, grant that it shall be everywhere, and in the rocks, and in the empty water-holes, and in the true love of all men, and in you, O God, at last . (White 316-17)

Further, this indigenization accompanies the painful process of individuation. Like Wordsworth, Stow and White assume "that if life is to be worth living there cannot be blank unreason or mere contingency at the heart of things" (Abrams 95); rather, suffering is "the necessary means toward the end of a greater good which is nothing other than the stage of achieved maturity" (Abrams 96). White's Voss undergoes a Jungian journey of individuation into the depths of the self as well as into the depths of the country, and, like Stow's Heriot, achieves a maturity that accepts the Taoist balance of good and evil in both self and world. Both men turn away from white society, Heriot specifically rejecting the values he has spent his life inculcating into his Aboriginal charges, Voss turning away from the materialism of the coast to seek the spiritual strength to be found in the desert of the interior.

Like Stow and White, Wrightson sets out to achieve an "imaginative fusion" of Australians with their land; unlike them, she uses the "literary algebra" of fantasy, the "set of accepted terms" drawn from folklore ("The Slippery Stuff of Fantasy," draft 15) to depict her characters' development towards wholeness. In The Nargun and the Stars she first achieves a distinctive Australian fantasy, and in that brief novel and the even briefer A Little Fear (1983) she uses a new combination of elements of fantasy and pastoral in a contemporary Australian setting to delineate part of the process of individuation in her protagonists. Both Simon Brent and Agnes Tucker achieve growth when they withdraw alone into a rural setting and come into contact with the spirits of the land, each one of which is seen as what Goldie calls "a positive emanation of nature" (132) and as an embodiment of "natural supernaturalism." Simon's experience in The Nargun and the Stars deals with the growth of a prepubescent child undergoing the first stage of individuation, "the experience of the SHADOW" (Jacobi 106). Despite her age, Agnes Tucker of A Little Fear also grows through the later stages of the individuation process, attaining the self-realization that is both the fullest development of her personality and a preparation for death.

On the broader canvas of the Wirrun trilogy Wrightson attempts an even more ambitious project: to write "more than simple fantasy," to present a "hero; legend in the grand style; an old and simple vision of the land," consciously "working only for [Australians]" ("Ever Since My Accident" 617). In so doing, she describes, like Stow and White, the protagonist's journey into the remote interior of the continent. She also uses the conventional romantic "spots of time" in places of tranquillity and sublimity to establish communion between her characters and nature, and presents Aborigines as "natural" characters in Goldie's sense -- the hero Wirrun, and the "People" who help him, naturally know more of the land than white Australians do. Though Simon of *The Nargun and the Stars* makes two journeys to the interior of the land, the second of which closely parallels the heroic journey described by Joseph Campbell as a "monomyth" (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* ix), Wirrun's journeys are both more extensive and more clearly elements of an indigenizing legend. His story begins in the geographical centre of the continent at Mount Conner (*Ice* 18) and develops as a series of three major journeys that take him, eventually, around the entire country. Further, in the Wirrun trilogy Wrightson attempts more in psychological terms. She deals with the whole process of individuation, moving (in Jungian terminology) from the achievement of a persona to the integration of the "shadow," recognition and integration of the anima (and the animus), acceptance of the help of the "spiritual principle" in the form of the "wise old man" (Jacobi 121), and, finally, self-realization and absorption into the collective unconscious.

To create an indigenizing legend that is simultaneously a journey of individuation, Wrightson uses, in a contemporary Australian setting, a literary form brought to a high pitch of sophistication in children's literature since the 1960s, that of high fantasy. In so doing, she must meet four requirements. First, she must make magic the major driving force of the story (Timmerman 73), giving "evidence of supernatural powers available and at work in the natural world" (Kuznets 19), and ranking characters in relation to their control of such powers (Timmerman 73). Second, she must develop a setting in which there can never be a "sense that the fantasy world is unreal or that the hero's experience is untrue" (Kuznets 20). Third, she must invent a"substantial and original fantasy world" that is "both sustained enough (often through two or three volumes) and clearly and significantly delineated enough (often by incorporating elements of classic mythologies) to serve as a fitting background for a story in which good and evil clash" (Kuznets 19). Fourth, she must present a protagonist who performs "heroic acts in the course of the story" (Kuznets 20) and thereby achieves the status of hero. Wrightson meets all of these requirements in the Wirrun trilogy, though the difficulty of doing so is great.

In order to make magic the driving force of The Song of Wirrun and to show the supernatural at work in a modern Australian setting, Wrightson extends the role of the spirit creatures first sketched in An Older Kind of Magic and developed in The Nargun and the Stars beyond that of verba visibilia. In The Nargun and the Stars one character, the Potkoorok, has some of the attributes of the "fool" and "wise animal" of the hero tale (Moss and Stott 415), but several of the main characters of the Wirrun trilogy take on roles analogous to those of figures of high fantasy based upon European myth and legend. The Mimi, Ko-in, the Yunggamurra, and Wulgaru resemble the helper, father figure, temptress, and villain of high fantasy. These characters are also, however, magical creatures found in Aboriginal folklore in specific localities all over the continent. The ethical propriety of Wrightson's use of such figures to present an indigenizing but European world view is an issue for discussion in the final chapter. In literary terms, her use of the spirit creatures in the trilogy confers both originality and indigenizing power upon her version of high fantasy.

Evidence of the action of supernatural powers in the world is found chiefly in the disturbance of nature noted by the people most attuned to nature, the Aborigines. Wrightson adapts Jindyworobak ideas about white Australians and the theme of the centrality of the land from the broader Australian literary tradition to rank her characters in relation to the supernatural. The Aborigines understand that the disturbance of nature is the result of supernatural forces; the Inlanders respect, but do not fully understand such a view (Ice 190); and the Happy Folk, all of whom refuse to "listen to the land," dismiss the supernatural by attempting to explain aberrations of the natural world scientifically or by denying their existence (Ice 148).

Wrightson uses her precise knowledge of the Australian landscape and her experience in describing it to create settings that sustain the credibility of fantastic events and characters. She has most difficulty with this task in The Ice is Coming, in which the action occurs close to the densely settled areas of the south-east coast, but as the trilogy unfolds she uses increasingly remote settings in which the harsh but exotic landscape and its strong associations with the traditional life of its Aboriginal people convincingly support the protagonist's experience of the supernatural. As Emrys Evans says, "[t]here are moments in the Wirrun books when we feel we are on the prosaic side of its looking-glass or wardrobe door .... But for most of the story we are on the spirit side of the land, wind-riding, ice-fighting, remaking the monster that was Ularra, deep in the rock of the centre with the earth-spirits and the lost Yunggamurra, or waiting in spirit-shape among the grave-trees for Wulgaru" (166).

Though Wrightson originally intended to tell Wirrun's story in a single novel, she realized while writing The Ice is Coming that she "had told only a beginning and not a story," and that she could not "turn a person into a hero ... without tracing what herohood really involves" ("Voyage in a Dinghy" 12). She sustains his story over three volumes, the first dealing with his de facto initiation, the second with his growth as a Clever Man especially conversant with the spirit world, and the third with his attainment of heroic status. Emrys Evans points out parallels between aspects of the trilogy and classic mythologies: the Yunggamurra resemble the Rhinemaidens, the Sirens, and the Lorelei; "the companionship of Murra and Wirrun is not unlike that of Brunnhilde and Siegfried -- certainly in its intensity and its brevity"; Ularra's lust leads to his "Circean transformation," but the help he gives Wirrun "brings him also the name of hero, though hero perhaps of a second order: Achates to Wirrun's Aeneas, Oliver to his Roland" (167). Wrightson herself is conscious of the parallels between the stories of Aboriginal folklore and those of Europe, noting especially stories of the Little People, of men turned into animals, and of the fairy-wife ("Deeper Than You Think" 9, 11, 12).

Conflicts within the trilogy are not, however, the Manichean battles between forces ranged on the side of good or evil to be found in high fantasies based upon European myth and legend, such as Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings or Cooper's Dark is Rising series. Rather, the strongly local, territorial values of Aboriginal folklore appear in the hero's struggle to contain powers that, like the Nargun in The Nargun and the Stars, create problems because of their departure or displacement from territories in which they legitimately belong. The trials of Wirrun, like those of Simon and Agnes Tucker, do not lead to the victory of light over darkness, or of good over evil, but to the achievement of personal wholeness that enables each character to deal with what Wrightson calls "the overriding problem that marks our half of the twentieth century -- "the need "[t]o face ourselves, to know ourselves, in order to endure ourselves" ("The Slippery Stuff of Fantasy" 23).

For Wrightson, as for her fellow children's fantasy writer Ursula Le Guin, the moral lessons of the journey into the unconscious are not drawn from "the tension between good and evil, light and dark," or from a "battle" between "heroes and villains" ("The Child and the Shadow" 67), as they are in the work of such Christian fantasists as C.S. Lewis or Madeleine L'Engle. Rather, as in the work of Stow and White, Wrightson's protagonists learn that evil is, as Le Guin argues in "The Child and the Shadow," "inextricably involved with" good "as in the yin-yang symbol" (66). Like Wrightson, Le Guin believes that the end of the journey of suffering is the maturity that enables the hero or heroine to see "the whole, which is greater than evil or good" ("Shadow" 66). Like Wrightson, Le Guin sees the fantastic hero tale as a means of enabling the child reader to face the self, and to accept "the injustices and grief and suffering that we all must bear, and the final shadow at the end of all" ("Shadow" 70).

In presenting Wirrun's attainment of heroic status, Wrightson combines the conventions of high fantasy, the interior journey used by her predecessors in developing an Australian legend, and the traditions of the country's Aboriginal people. Wirrun's heroic acts, like those of the conventional hero of high fantasy, involve physical and mental courage and endurance in the course of a quest. They also resemble the actions of Stow's Heriot and White's Voss in that they reflect the process of individuation and the rejection of the unthinking, materialistic values of the Happy Folk of the coast in favour of spiritual values of simplicity, self-control, and self-knowledge derived from endurance and suffering in a harsh land. Wirrun's apotheosis at the end of Behind the Wind resembles the disappearance of Aboriginal culture-heroes into the land itself, leaving behind a natural feature marking the place of that disappearance (Rowley 70-71).

In the end, the tensions generated by the enormous difficulty of combining high fantasy and indigenizing legend in a contemporary setting overtax Wrightson's capacities. Nevertheless, the very ambitiousness and complexity of the Wirrun trilogy mark the extent of her growth as a writer. During the twenty-five years between the publication of The Crooked Snake and that of Behind the Wind, Wrightson's work evolved from the simple holiday story into distinctive and powerful fantasy, and has since continued to break new ground. As an Australian writer, formed in a romantic tradition and made into an indigenizing author by her desire to create an Australian legend, Patricia Wrightson has expressed in children's novels the major themes of the Australian literary tradition. As a children's writer, she has provided, at the international level, a distinctively Australian expression of the great issues that concern people of any age and any nation -- the attainment of a sense of wholeness and personal identity, and the discovery of meaning in human existence.

Chapter Two

A Course of Training

Few writers are more aware of their intentions than Patricia Wrightson, and so it is astonishing that she should have needed the prompting of another to clarify her view of the development of her work before the completion of her first successful Australian fantasy. "When my son...handed back the typescript of The Nargun and the Stars he said, 'You've been working towards this from the very beginning, haven't you?' I was surprised, for I hadn't realized that the course had been as long as that; but he was right. I've traced the track, and it goes back at least to my second book" ("The Slippery Stuff of Fantasy," draft 16). The word "course" recalls Wrightson's use of the same word in an earlier description of how she started to write for her two children, "very deliberately making my work into a course of training, requiring that in each book I should break new and (for me) difficult ground" (Townsend, A Sense of Story 212).

Wrightson's "course," like any other process of learning, has not been a smooth and consistently successful development, but by 1972 she had arrived at a stable philosophical stance and a conscious intention to write distinctively Australian fantasy for a primarily Australian readership. Wrightson's philosophy can best be described as secular romanticism; for Wrightson, as for Wordsworth, this world is the natural abode "Of all of us, the place in which, in the end, / We find our happiness, or not at all" (Prelude 3. 727-28). As she moves from the simple outdoor adventure tale to a consideration of more demanding themes, she adopts the romantic conventions, common in Australian literature, by which characters are defined and linked to the natural world, and she comes to rely on those conventions even in novels set in the city. In two of her early novels she seeks to strengthen characters' links to the Australian landscape by exploiting the "semiotic field of the indigene" (Goldie 17). She rejects Christian notions of transcendence, sin, and retribution in favour of a romantic belief in self-discovery and self-formation, a belief that readily translates into her depiction of aspects of individuation in the five novels following *An Older Kind of Magic*. In each of these novels, unlike those preceding *An Older Kind of Magic*, Wrightson makes use of the combination of indigenizing fantasy and realism that she first uses successfully in *The Nargun and the Stars*.

Technically, Wrightson learns to use dialogue deftly and plausibly and to describe settings accurately. Besides producing a gallery of characters ranging from caricatures and dully conventional figures to convincing and particularized Australian adults and children, she also attempts, with varying success, to develop unusual central characters whose world-view provides an alternative to the norm. Further, despite conventional wisdom requiring male central characters in children's fiction and the apparent conventionality of her own view of adult women, she creates several strong female figures. She learns to strike a balance between lack of supporting detail and over-invention in the writing of fantasy, and to avoid undercutting the credibility of fantasy by suggesting that events may have been imaginary. The "course of training" also reveals characteristic weaknesses in Wrightson's work: her occasionally mechanical use of character to state fairly demanding and abstract themes; her unwillingness to trust child readers to understand such themes without underscoring through the use of symbol, dialogue, allusion, and authorial comment; and her discomfort with sexuality.

Peter Wrightson was correct in seeing The Nargun and the Stars as the end of his mother's "course of training," for in that novel she makes full use of the strengths she has developed in the novels that precede it. She links her characters to contemporary Australia, and makes its landscape an active force in the novel, by bringing together romantic pastoral and the indigenizing power of fantastic characters that embody both nature and the Aboriginal past. She explores the processes of self-discovery and self-development in an individual character by exchanging the "arithmetic" of realism for the "algebra" of the fantastic journey that embodies those processes and the process of descent into the land (Beatson 64). Not surprisingly, she describes her achievement in The Nargun and the Stars as "hurtling into freedom" ("Hurtling into Freedom" 7), but such freedom would not have been possible without the learning achieved between the writing of The Crooked Snake and that of An Older Kind of Magic.

Patricia Wrightson's first novel, The Crooked Snake, was published in 1955, and while it won the Book of the Year Award of the Children's Book Council of N.S.W. in 1956, it is unremarkable, combining harmless adventure with the inculcation of civic virtue, self-reliance, and conservation. As noted above, it was "written for [her] own children (the Jenny and Pete of the story) and as practice" (Anderson 114). Just as Wrightson's predecessors in Australian literature drew upon European, especially British tradition, so Wrightson's first two novels depend heavily upon the English outdoor adventure story developed during the 1930s and 1940s by Arthur Ransome. The "Crooked Snake," in the Swallows and Amazons tradition, is a secret society of children who preserve a rainforest sanctuary against the depredations of older and rougher children by the usual combination of detective work, intelligence, and superior courage, assisted by timely adult intervention. The "Crooked Snake's" interest in wild-life and photography, their labelling of parents and villains, and their relentlessly responsible behaviour strongly echo similar elements in Ransome's novels The Coot Club and Great Northern?. Wrightson, like Ransome, imparts information about competence and safety in the outdoors, most obviously in the rite of admission to the secret society. In addition, the children are models of responsibility and civic-mindedness. They cautiously light and tend their fires, always close gates, conscientiously complete their chores, and show adult prudence: even after an outburst of rage in which Peter drives off the villains with the branch of a stinging-tree, he remembers to lay it "carefully out of the way" (144).

The children of the Crooked Snake society are as middle-class, as law-abiding, and as scholastically able as their counterparts among the Swallows and Amazons, and even speak like them, for occasionally Wrightson's dialogue lurches from the vaguely Australian to the unmistakably English: "Spike and Squeak...said that the masks had looked super" (18); "They're pretty game, our side, I mean...But the other chaps are bigger...Do you think Mr Tom Berry will come out with us, and catch the chaps and take charge of the evidence?" (141). Wrightson also uncritically adopts the sex-role stereotyping of her British model: John, the leader of the group, exerts the unchallenged authority of his namesake in the Swallows and Amazons series, and males assume responsibility for females in difficult situations. Males produce practical solutions to problems (65) and perform the decisive actions of the story (143). Though females are assertive, they also achieve their ends by the deliberate use of charm (52, 89).

There are features of *The Crooked Snake*, however, that presage developments in Wrightson's later novels. She links her heroes to the natural world, though at this stage only vaguely, by commenting on their appreciation of its beauty (Manyweathers 3), and she differentiates three of them as being especially sensitive to nature (*The Crooked Snake* 23, 68). Further, she ranks all characters in the novel according to their attitude to the land. As guardians of the land (against official as well as unofficial exploitation) the children of the Crooked Snake Society presage the "People" of the Wirrun trilogy. As intelligent users and custodians of the land, the Berrys are forerunners of Charlie Waters, the "Man in Charge" of *The Nargun* and the Stars, and of the "Inlanders" in the Wirrun trilogy. As destructive and careless exploiters of the land, the "Dangerous Persons" are the antecedents of Sir Mortimer Wyvern of An Older Kind of Magic, the bulldozer driver of The Nargun and the Stars, and the "Happy Folk" of the Wirrun novels. Wrightson also begins to focus on one child, Peter, whose anger prompts him to action at the climax of the novel just as Simon's does in The Nargun and the Stars. Basically, however, Wrightson differentiates the children by appearance and conventional sex-roles rather than by specific traits of character.

In her next novel, The Bunyip Hole (1957), a conventional adventure tale contains Wrightson's first attempt at dealing with the inner life of a character. Like The Crooked Snake, the novel is set in the Bonalbo district, and "arose from a day when Jenny and Pete and [the author] nearly walked into a 'bunyip hole'" (Anderson 114-15). The story is, like its predecessor, an innocuous British-style holiday adventure in which the four Collins children deal with two city boys, staying in the country for the Easter vacation, who kidnap the Collins's dog. As in The Crooked Snake, the villains are differentiated mainly by their insensitivity to the land, as shown by their deliberate defiling and destruction of the swimming pool constructed and beautified by the heroes.

To the Australian rural setting Wrightson adds British class consciousness as indicated by dress and dialect. Unlike the sober

Collins children, the city-bred villains wear "brightly patterned shirts and cowboy hats," but, ironically, they cannot handle horses (16). Though the Collins children are middle-class, scholastically able and safety-conscious, like those of the Crooked Snake Society, their talk is more recognizably and accurately Australian :

> "Tell you what, Val ... We'll have to get rid of some of that broken glass from the bottom pool tomorrow. If mum saw that she'd have a willy, specially when she heard how it came there" (58).

The villains follow the British tradition of lower class dialect: "It's gettin' darker... That's O.K. -- got me torch in me pocket" (114); "You didn't waste no time up there on the hill" (126). Despite the more Australian flavour of dialogue, a Times Literary Supplement reviewer noted that "[t]he same adventures might have happened to an English family on holiday in Cornwall or North Devon .... One might have stayed in England and read Arthur Ransome" (November 21, 1958: xxi). The villains are "the enemy" (94), also known as the Bandicoots, and Ken, the eldest Collins child, emulates Captain Nancy's coining of extravagant names for them. Wrightson, like Ransome, explains in detail how the children complete tasks such as setting up camp, constructing a "ghost," and effecting a rescue. Sex roles are stereotyped; like John of The Crooked Snake, Ken has unchallenged authority among the children of The Bunyip Hole, and boys are builders and girls are "housewives" (37) held responsible for meals by their mother (67). Their father is the authority in the home, the source of nurture and advice to Binty (42), and of information to all the children. As in Ransome's novels, parents can be managed by children who know what to promise and how to bargain (57). There is an additional similarity: the character of Binty "owes much to Arthur Ransome's Titty, who is often torn by self-doubt and secret terrors in Swallows and Amazons and Swallowdale" (Manyweathers 8).

In The Bunyip Hole Wrightson's exploration of the benefits and drawbacks of Binty's vivid imagination and the fear it engenders is as important as adventure in the Ransome style, though it is hardly more sophisticated, proceeding as it does through obvious contrast and obtrusive use of adult character and authorial comment. Binty's brother and sisters are sturdy, fair-headed, practical, successful children. Binty, on the other hand, is "dark and thin, with a flag of brown hair half-mast over one eye" (7). By turns dreamy, startled, and wildly excited, he is something of a mystery to the more stolid Collins children, who struggle to understand his dislike of his name. Wrightson summarizes Binty's reaction to their acceptance of his explanation in her terms, not his: "For once they had understood; or even if they hadn't they were allowing him his point of view" (16).

From this scene onwards, the narrative concentrates on Binty's adventures, leading to a climactic scene in which he attains the courage and self-control he has been striving towards, but Wrightson is unable as yet to present a convincing child's-eye-view of the world. In "The Geranium Leaf" Wrightson describes the technique she uses in The Bunyip Hole and later novels: "Probably the best and fairest way [of treating themes] is to state the theme directly at some point when you have developed your argument, putting the words as naturally and spontaneously as possible into the mouth of a suitable character" (178). Here she uses the technique very mechanically, putting the theme into the mouth of Binty's father, and explaining Mr. Collins's motivation for describing Binty's fear in terms directed to adults rather than to a child reader: "Mr. Collins decided to risk a few words more" (42). Though the process by which Binty overcomes his fear is one of self-formation, his own "magic charm" is adult in tone: "Stop worrying about things till you come to them. One thing first, and then the next" (140). The twelve-year-old Ken's advice to Binty sounds like that of a parent also, even to the use of the word "son" (118), though the term "old son" is an occasional usage among adult Australian males.

In the climactic scene of the novel, however, Wrightson first uses another means of depicting the inner life of a character. Binty's moment of awareness of the land foreshadows similar, more explicit moments of unity with nature felt by Eustace, Simon, and Wirrun: "The nightmare faded away; he felt the strength of the damp rock under him and the wet solid hill behind" (111). Binty also adopts the name of the Bunyip that embodies his fear, a process hinting at an idea that Wrightson develops more completely in The Nargun and the Stars; the Nargun, the embodiment of Simon's "shadow," has his name on it.

Despite hints of things to come, The Bunyip Hole is based firmly on the British holiday adventure. Landscape is primarily a setting for action, and the relationship of the children to the land is middle-class and European: they explore it and enjoy it, but with the exception of Binty feel little personal response to it. The bunyip of the title is merely a "fikshus" (34) animal, a foolish superstition from a remote and primitive past: "It was bitterns making their noise, but the blacks thought it must be a strange animal, so they made up the bunyip" (35). Yet the "blacks" of the Bandjelang tribe were and are very much a part of the population of the Bonalbo region, though their children could be "a lonely few among the other children" (Anderson 115). In depicting the experience of one such Aboriginal child and of two lonely white children, Wrightson lifts her next novel to a much higher thematic and technical level.

In The Rocks of Honey she turns from the hackneyed, partly imported world of middle-class heroes, lower-class villains, and secret societies to the realities of Australian childhood in her home town in 1960. She tackles the difficult issue of discrimination, subsuming it within the larger theme of individual isolation, and suggesting that discrimination can be overcome when Aboriginal and white Australians recognize the value of the Aboriginal past as well as its inevitable loss, and when the passage of time allows the land to shape people of European stock as it once shaped the Aborigines. In attempting to encompass so much, and to do so in a contemporary setting, Wrightson calls upon the resources of personal knowledge, symbol, romantic pastoral, and the semiotic field of the indigene. Though she does not manage to articulate these elements into a unified whole, they are all important in her later fantasy, and they enable her in this instance to produce a novel that is unmistakably Australian and unmistakably her own.

Based as it is on her experience of relations between contemporary white Australians and Europeanized Aborigines in a small town in northern New South Wales, Wrightson's novel tackles what J.J. Healy calls the "private task of understanding the Aborigine in ethical or ontological terms that we meet in Patrick White or Randolph Stow" (244). Except in the chapter entitled "The Stone Axe," The Rocks of Honey does not distance Aborigines by depicting their traditional life in a remote place or a past time, and differs, therefore, from such children's novels as Rex Ingamells's novel of Northern Territory traditional life, Aranda Boy (1952), Kylie Tennant's novel of the Torres Strait Islands, All the Proud Tribesmen (1959), and Nan Chauncy's novels dealing with the historical crime of the attempted extinction of the Tasmanian Aborigines, Tangara (1960) and Mathinna's People (1967).

Wrightson's novel differs, too, from most adult fiction dealing with "what was called The Aboriginal Problem," as Kylie Tennant put it in 1959 (102). The majority of adult writers who dealt with the "Problem" during the 1960s and 1970s -- such writers as Leonard Mann, Dymphna Cusack, Peter Mathers, and Thomas Keneally -- were engaged in what Healy calls a "social, collective venture with pragmatic, sentimental ambitions" that turned Aborigines into symbols and dealt with themes of "guilt catching up with history" (244). Wrightson presents the Aboriginal characters of her novel as commonplace members of a contemporary local community, whose history and culture are of value to that community, and whose place in the national community is ultimately the same as that of all its people. Nevertheless, as Goldie points out, she cannot escape the semiotic consequences of using indigenous characters (18).

The people of The Rocks of Honey are not the bland, middle-class families of Wrightson's two preceding novels. Besides being Hope's "real" Australians of fiction, they are the ordinary adults and children of the Bonalbo district. Barney's father is a dairy farmer, Winnie's the "tick-dodger" for the area (24), and Eustace's uncle and aunt are Aborigines who take whatever farm and domestic work they can find locally. Wrightson catches their talk with unobtrusive accuracy, distinguishing the dialect of Aboriginal Australians from that of white farm lads like Barney. The inaccurate dialect of The Crooked Snake and the comparatively crudely differentiated talk of The Bunyip Hole are gone for ever; from now on one of the distinctive features of Wrightson's best work is her control of dialogue and accuracy of dialect. Because she knows the people and the setting intimately, Wrightson can readily depict the entrenched and unthinking racism that affects Eustace Murray and his family, and the equally entrenched and unthinking sexism that affects Winnie Bates.

The racism of adults and children is not so much active, consistent discrimination as what Wrightson herself calls the "peculiar, perhaps defensive, lack of appreciative response, that strange white-blindness, that deprives [Aborigines] of human dignity" ("When Cultures Meet" 189) and denied them citizenship until 1967. Mr. Willis says that Tom Gordon is "a reliable old sort" (11) but treats the stone axe with condescension (135). Mrs. Willis classifies Aboriginal people by race and offensive epithet (11), yet feels a mysterious sympathy for them; she warns Barney to avoid Eustace (23), yet accepts the boys' co-operation (37) and leaves Barney in the care of Mary Gordon (106). The schoolchildren mock Eustace by nickname (15) and by gibes about eating witchetty grubs (140), yet they vie for his athletic skill (31). Mrs. Bates is content to allow Winnie to travel with Barney and Eustace, but avoids offering Eustace a lift (34).

Sexism is equally unthinking. Winnie challenges the unquestioned rights of males and the separation of males and females in the school playground by refusing to move from a garden seat (32), but also benefits from female solidarity (34). Because of her parents' unwillingness to grant her independence (49-50), Winnie must suffer Barney's outrage at having to take care of a girl and endure the consequent mockery of other children, both male and female (53). Finally, she must deal with Barney's assumption that she will meekly give up the axe because as a girl she is either uninterested in such things or willing to give it up as a sign of her gratefulness at being allowed to join the boys. But it is through the individual experiences of all three children that Wrightson shows how barriers of race and sex can be overcome in the process of overcoming individual isolation, for the central characters of The Rocks of Honey are three lonely children, each of whom has something to offer the other two.

From Eustace and Winnie, Barney learns in different ways to step outside his "cocksure" (25) complacency and to imagine the world through the eyes of another. From Eustace, Winnie receives the understanding that enables her to tolerate Barney (120) until he provokes the "fine, galloping anger" (155) that leads her to assert herself openly. From Barney, Eustace receives the friendship that strengthens his self-respect (117); from Winnie he receives the assurance that begins to free him from shame at his Aboriginal inheritance (143). All three children find wholeness through acceptance of each other as persons (a process brought about in dealing with the axe) and through moments of unity with the land, which Wrightson, in common with the Jindyworobaks, suggests will eventually unite all its inhabitants.

The action of the three main characters in relation to the stone axe both drives the plot and embodies the themes of mutual acceptance, and, for Eustace, self-acceptance. The search for the axe brings the boys together and leads to Winnie's attempts to achieve acceptance; its discovery challenges Barney's belief that he is superior to an Aborigine and a girl, and requires Winnie's eventual inclusion in the partnership of axe owners. The axe is a multivalent symbol in the novel: for Uncle Tom, a reminder of the glories of the past (167); for Barney, the means of opening his mind to the antiquity of human life in a familiar landscape (67,80); for Eustace, a reminder of his difference (172) and of a past he must understand rather than deny or disparage (175); for Mr. Willis, an example of primitive technology (135); for Mrs. Willis and Mary Gordon, a source of mysterious fear (135, 169); and for Winnie, a source of fear but also a means of asserting herself (166, 167). While Wrightson's first use of a central symbol is effective, it is also intrusive; through the reported thoughts of Eustace, she summarizes the meanings of the axe as part of a laboured conclusion to the novel.

Although Wrightson's use of symbol in the novel lacks subtlety, her use of another technique, that of romantic pastoral, is more assured. She uses "spots of time" in a sublime or tranquil landscape to bring her characters into communion with themselves and others, the landscape in each case being the locus amoenus of the Rocks of Honey and the surrounding bushland and pasture. On four occasions Wrightson describes the journeys of central characters of the novel into that locus amoenus, and on each occasion the children's interconnectedness and self-awareness grow stronger. On their first visit, Barney and Eustace share a tranquil moment in which "[t]he quiet of the hills spread[s] over the little noises of the creek" (41). Barney becomes conscious of the value of having a friend, and his "shyly" asked question (41) prompts Eustace to articulate something of the experience of being an Aboriginal child. The boys' second journey to the Rocks leads to the openness of swimming naked in the creek, to discussion of their plans for the future, and, in the sublimity of sunset, to a moment that brings both boys into communion with the country, Barney wondering about its Aboriginal past, Eustace feeling "the might and power of the old land" (81) and a suggestion of his special relationship to it as a descendant of its Aboriginal people. The third journey to the Rocks of Honey brings all three children together in the hail storm, and Winnie's finding the axe precipitates the later recognition by each child of the issues that separate them. Eustace makes the fourth journey to the Rocks alone, at dawn, carrying the axe that all three children have agreed should be returned to its place. In a moment reminiscent of Wordsworth's experience of illumination above a similar mist-filled valley (1805 Prelude 13.40-65), Eustace hears the land telling of its power to enfold all its people, brown and white, in what Goldie calls an "ontological embrace [that] exceeds all limitations" (29). Such acute awareness of the power of the land, however, is peculiar to Eustace. Though he is an individual child facing the racist realities of an Australian country town in 1960, he is also, with his aunt and uncle, an indigene, part of a "semiotic field" (Goldie 18) that operates in three of the categories propounded by Goldie (17), those of mysticism, orality, and historicity.

Eustace's mystical relationship to his country, his awareness of what Goldie calls "the alien Other" (127), enables him to hear the "great voiceless words" (174) that clearly express Wrightson's "natural supernaturalism" and her wish to link all Australians to "the natural power" of the land (Goldie 29). Tom Gordon's instinctive capacity to communicate with Barney (24) leads to Barney's friendship with Eustace and ensures that Barney develops from seeing the land "with a farmer's eye" (42) to seeing "his own familiar home with a strange face" (67). Mary Gordon has a disconcertingly penetrating gaze (22, 115) and her brother's intuitive understanding of children (115). All three Aboriginal characters communicate the land to Barney in yet another way; Barney notices that their voices have "the same quality, something of the chime of bird-calls. They were bird-voices" (57).

In Tom Gordon's stories the "essential dynamism" and "presence of life" of oral culture (Goldie 108) make a deep impression on the unimaginative Barney, enabling him to conceive of a world "alive, laughing, stern, and very full of magic" that is also the "same world, this very one" (67) that he inhabits. Tom's stories enter the minds of both boys in the moment of communion in which Barney wonders who had made the hidden axe and Eustace feels his own connection to the land. This moment immediately precedes the chapter in which, in language recalling the cadences of formal, oral story-telling, Wrightson takes her readers back to a golden age of Aboriginal life before white contact, the world of "Warrimai the Club-thrower ... he of the Githurrbal clan of the Bandjelang peoples" (82).

Although the chapter entitled "the Stone Axe" is structurally and stylistically intrusive, it achieves the same effect as the opening chapter of The Nargun and the Stars in that it enables readers to understand the connection between past and present in a way that characters in the novel do not. It also enables Wrightson to place the Aboriginal past on an evolutionary "temporal slope" (Fabian 17). Warrimai's world is a "pure" one "that precedes the white destruction of nature" (Goldie 151) but it is also a world that "will not be again" (Rocks 82). Eustace learns from Winnie that "[e]veryone's got a stone axe in their family a long time ago" and that "they're finished" (143). He is right to let the tractor draw him "like a magnet" (162) and to leave "the stone axe behind for good" (176).

Eustace literally leaves the axe behind "for good" in the closing chapter of The Rocks of Honey, a chapter in which Wrightson's difficulties in dealing with the indigenizing Bildungsgeschichte in a brief, realistic novel become most apparent. Without the fantastic journey of individuation, and without fantastic characters that take part in the action and also connect the protagonist to the land, the narrative of The Rocks of Honey ends in an obvious summary of themes in which Wrightson combines the sublime romantic "moment"; the symbols of axe, tears, and apple; the voice of the land half imagined by the indigene among the main characters; and abstract, adult authorial comment presented as the thoughts of a child. Nevertheless, The Rocks of Honey is one of the most successful exercises in Wrightson's "course of training" and one to which she returns in her later work. Her depiction of rural characters and settings becomes particularized and accurate, and her experiments with the uncanny, seen in the mishaps with the axe, in Warrimai's dream journeys, and in suggestions of what Eustace "almost" feels (81) and seems to hear (174) point towards the full-blown fantasy of her later novels. Clearly in writing The Nargun and the Stars Wrightson returned to The Rocks of Honey: for the assertion that "[n]one of us owns the land" (143), for the orphaned boy facing his fear in the form of a stone and burying it in a significant place, for the intuitive adult brother and sister, and for the combination of the romantic pastoral and the indigenizing power of Aboriginal reference.

Romanticism is even more important to Wrightson's next novel, The Feather Star (1962), being made explicit in the view of life that Wrightson advocates as well as being implicit in the action of the novel. Fifteen-year-old Lindy Martin's life has lost "the glory and the freshness of a dream." Aware as never before of time and of mortality, she must make a conscious choice between what Abrams calls "the world's song of life and joy" (431) that is expressed through nature and through other people, and the sterility of refusal or condemnation of life. In presenting Lindy's awakening to that choice, Wrightson expresses for the first time the romantic world view central to her later fantasy novels: that humankind's greatest good is found in "sharply conscious" awareness of life (Star 166), in fellowship with others, and in acceptance of suffering that includes the knowledge of mortality.

The distant stars discussed by Lindy and her friends but ignored by Abel (87) constitute both a challenge and an indication of man's place in the universe. Only faith in the continuance of the "strange, secret life" of the natural world and of human fellowship (86) can counterbalance the rejection of nature and the isolation caused by fear of mortality (177). The feather star of the title inspires Lindy, as Wordsworth says,

> To look with feelings of fraternal love
> Upon those unassuming things that hold
> A silent station in this beauteous world.
> (1805 Prelude 13.51-3)

For Wrightson "the magnitude of the most trivial things" (Abrams 403) becomes an article of romantic faith; the rock pools of The Feather Star recur in The Ice is Coming as microcosms of an interrelated universe in which man is member rather than master and in which the small size of the Eldest Nargun belies its importance -- facts most clearly seen by the romantically envisaged Aboriginal elder Johnny Wuthergul and by the spirits of the land (Ice 211, 222).

Such conscious awareness of man's place in the universe is not needed by young children, who have not yet lost the "condition of wholeness and community" (Abrams 313) of which Wordsworth writes in the "Intimations" ode. Chris Martin and his friend Annie Tippett are ceaselessly busy with play and absorbed in the wholeness of the present moment; they imaginatively invest the most mundane things with significance, and rarely consider the consequences of their actions. Wrightson ironically contrasts them with the adolescent characters: when Lindy feels that her new-found friends are "acting like children" (122) the real children are playing happily and disagreeing without animosity. "The harmoniousness of childhood," says Hegel," is a gift from the hand of nature: the second harmony must spring from the labour and the culture of the spirit" (Logic 24.46). Lindy must now strive towards this second harmony, though she is young enough to remember the things that "kids always do" (34) and even to do them herself, only to find, "all at once, the excitement [go] out of them" (47).

Having lost the natural harmony of childhood, Lindy occasionally feels "suddenly alone" (16), and Wrightson sentimentally and vaguely presents the natural world as a reflection of Lindy's adolescent emotions, as when "the lamenting of the sea" becomes "a wild, lonely sound and the lighthouse flashe[s] from far away across the soft, broad loneliness of the dark" (121). Further, Lindy's feelings extend to others; she is moved to pity of Abel's mortality reflected in the inexorable movement of the dunes towards his hut (171). Annie Tippett, on the other hand, throws a stick at the hut to find out whether Abel is inside. Lindy has lost Annie's obstinate self-possession, for while Annie is adept at cadging ice-creams, capable of minor theft, and impervious to the refrain "You go on home, Annie Tippett," Lindy is acutely self-conscious (22), and, like Felice, is learning to adapt to the limitations of being female in Australian culture in 1963. Felice does not "explode," but seems "suddenly embarrassed" (169) by the suggestion that "poor simple females" should "have a nice chat about knitting or something and let a couple of men" build a fire that will burn. In an earlier exchange Lindy has shown a conscious capacity to maintain an apparently passive role while achieving her ends by manipulation. She notes that Bill seems "satisfied with her look of dazed admiration" but "cunningly" leads him "into her trap" of self-revelation with a question that elicits a line of his verse (71).

Immediately afterwards, Lindy shares with Bill her knowledge of the feather star (72) in one of the moments of communion that balance her moments of separation. Such romantic moments of communion occur in natural settings, as when stars, sea, and darkness bring Lindy close to companions sharing the "adventure" of travelling through space on "the spinning world" (87). When such moments involve sexuality, however, Wrightson shows the constraint and indirection that recur whenever the topic arises in her work. In The Feather Star such experiences of "warmth and completeness" (166) can take explicitly romantic, literary, and unlikely form, as when Bill and Lindy see the open prospect of "the still, calm face of the land fronting the bright movement of the sea .... 'She has hidden her face in a mantle of cloud,' quote[s] Bill, 'and her feet in the surges'" (166). Though she says that this moment of awareness of self and of nature causes Lindy and Bill to grow "warm and large" (166), Wrightson turns at once to the indirection of a symbol that too obviously embodies the characteristically romantic "breakthrough from sensual into imaginative seeing" (Abrams 390). Lindy has already seen the feather star as "secret life" hidden in the darkness of the sea-wall (49); then she has linked the life of the feather star to that of the earth and a universe of stars (88); now she and Bill share the experience of the continuity of life, finding that the broken feather star has begun to regenerate, "living and growing, at least two where one had been before" (167). Wrightson also uses the "chuckle" of the sea among the rocks of the wall, already part of each description of the scene, to suggest the pleasure of life in its continuance.

A similar heavy-handedness marks the expression of Wrightson's advocacy of secular romanticism as a world view. Against Abel's refusal to enjoy the living world and against his guilt-ridden religion, Wrightson places the redemptive capacity of Wordsworth's "feeling intellect" (1805 Prelude 13.205) and Blake's belief that "every thing that lives is holy, life delights in life, / Because the soul of sweet delight can never be defil'd" America: A Prophecy Plate 8.13-14). The final scene of the novel suffers from Wrightson's relentless underscoring of this opposition through biblical allusion, natural description, authorial comment, and dialogue. She uses the same sublime natural event to contrast Abel's vision of an afterlife of torment and reward (Revelation 4.6; 15.2) and Lindy's vision of a living universe of which she and her friends are living parts:

> 'There's a sea of glass, I tell you, a sea of glass and a sea of fire.'
>
> There was indeed. The estuary lay dark and still as glass with the glow of red clouds burning across it. It was very beautiful. (177)

Wrightson continues the parallels, setting the "smoke of ... torment" against the smoke of the youngsters' driftwood fire, and "wailing" and "mourning" against "the deep, strong crying of the sea" (177). In an authorial comment she contrasts the light of the fire, the feather star, and friendship with the darkness of Abel's misanthropy, goes on to describe Lindy's weeping over Abel's "refusal of life" (178), and underscores the theme yet again though Mrs. Martin's comments on Abel and her encouraging assurance that Lindy will "keep life always" (180).

Anxiety to prevent readers' misinterpretations of fairly abstract themes mars the close of both The Rocks of Honey and The Feather Star, yet both are novels in which Wrightson can depend upon well established romantic conventions to connect characters to the natural world and to each other. In her next novel, Down to Earth (1963), Wrightson forgoes those conventions because of a significant change in setting from the country to the inner city area of Sydney. Wrightson made the change because of suggestions that rural settings had become a cliché and that the predominantly urban Australian population needed novels that reflected their way of life ("Australian" 12, 14), though in fact she has never attempted to describe the outer suburbs in which most Australians live. The urban setting cuts Wrightson off from the countryside and the people she knows best, and she falls back upon what is for her the surer ground of a group of prepubertal child characters, upon mechanical use of character and authorial comment, and upon caricature and satire that both seem to be indebted to Dickens. To deal with the difficult theme of solipsism, however, Wrightson makes her first, flawed attempt at using the "algebra" of fantasy.

Though Down to Earth "cheekily suggest[s] that the dreaded invasion from outer space [has] already happened while we were looking the other way" ("Accident" 610), it is not an example of science fiction because it makes no attempt to explain the technology that enables visitors from another galaxy to spend a quiet holiday in Sydney, and shows no interest in comparing humankind's current scientific and technical knowledge with that of a more advanced species (Timmerman 14-15). The novel is not an effective fantasy either. As Wrightson herself later realized, its lack of conviction stems, at least in part, from her attempt to draw "on the new folklore of science fiction" rather than on "the older authenticity of magic" ("Accident" 610). Magic, and the stories of real folklore that contain it, both spring from universal human experiences and desires. Down to Earth contains no magic; rather, it is a ponderous examination of communication between beings whose only common features are the energy and matter of physics, and of the political, social, and legal oddities of Sydney in 1963, through the eyes of a fantastic but vaguely imagined visitor from outer space.

The character of Martin the Martian, as George Adams calls him, is an uncertain one for two reasons. The first is the reason that Wrightson rejects as unimportant in the Author's Note to the novel: she does not "explain the little details of how things happen" (6), the very details needed to make Martin and his existence on earth credible, and so "her book is flawed precisely in those areas where she is trying to establish a common ground between human and alien" (Crago 36). Though Wrightson tries to evade the necessity to establish credibility in Down to Earth, her Author's Note indicates her recognition of another problem she must later solve in order to write convincing fantasy. The second reason for Martin's vagueness as a character is his adult world-view and vocabulary; he is another mouthpiece for the author in a novel already overburdened with authorial comment. The pace of the novel is clogged by Martin's abstract explanations of the problem of solipsism and of man's unwarranted arrogance in assuming the explanatory power of human thought, since "the truth is somewhere outside the separate prisons in which we live" (185). He conducts this argument with the children at intervals during the course of the novel and in a completely adult exchange with the Professor at its close (184-85).

Wrightson uses Martin for more than discussion of the abstractions of physics and perception. Like the writer of Montesquieu's Lettres persanes (Townsend, A Sounding of Storytellers 208), he is a naive and intelligent but obviously adult observer presenting a comic view of such social institutions as money, zoos, free speech, and recreational fishing. Wrightson goes beyond comedy, however, to belabour the legal asininities of the Child Welfare Act and the predictably hostile reaction of the world's leaders to the unknown. Such an attack is of doubtful interest to children, and requires the provision of abstract information, which Wrightson supplies through characters and comment.

Knowledge of the child welfare system comes from the anachronistic figure of Luke Day, who casts light with the knowing superiority of a Dickensian urchin upon the details of district officers, holding centres, courts, and ways to avoid the police. Knowledge of the world's hostility comes from George's father, "who like[s] to study international politics" (159). His puzzled comments about a sudden settling of disagreements within the United Nations and a decision to hold manouevres off Sydney are overheard by George, whose consequent reflections are couched in the uncharacteristically literary terms of an intrusive authorial voice: "Now the dragons' teeth were spilt and were springing up in serried ranks of ... troops" to meet the arrival of Martin's space vehicle with "ships, planes, radar, searchlights, and probably rockets" (161).

Down to Earth offers more action and suspense than any of Wrightson's preceding novels, and some broad comedy: in the children's attempts to protect "Martin the Martian" from his own indiscretions, in the uneasy alliance between the kind but assertively male George Adams and the acerbic and equally assertive Cathy Brimble, and in Martin's peculiar physical characteristics. There is also subtler, more ironical amusement to be found in the children's inarticulate defence of freedom of speech, in the failure of the people of earth to recognize intergalactic visitors and of those visitors to recognize one another, in the warlike reaction of an organization dedicated to peace, in the need of a welfare organization to charge children with a crime in order to help them, and in the contrast between Martin's measured formality and the idiomatic Australian speech of the children.

Most of the enjoyment of the novel, however, comes from plot rather than character, for the children of Down to Earth do not have the depth of their counterparts in The Rocks of Honey. Elizabeth Brown is little more than a vacuously decorative foil for Cathy Brimble, and David Gates little more than the source of a boat. Luke Day is a latter day Artful Dodger, one of a gallery of caricatures such as Dr. Leadswinger, the saturnine Professor, the researcher, and the Cat Lady (an actual eccentric who was the subject of a pair of sonnets by Douglas Stewart). George and Cathy resemble Barney and Winnie from The Rocks of Honey, but Wrightson presents their male-female conflict through comments on "feminine wrong-headedness" (141) and through "every scornful line ... of [Cathy's] body saying 'Boys!'" (143) more than through action such as Cathy's rescuing Martin from the children's shelter. Once again, female independence seems to exist only among children. Though Cathy Brimble sounds like George's mother when encouraging Martin (53), she does not resemble her in acting "helplessly" (159), nor does she frown with "dutiful concentration" (160) before declaring her inability to understand politics.

Cathy is important to the theme of mutual understanding, for she gives Martin the chalks that permit him to communicate his view of the world (111), and persists to the last in her belief that such communication is possible (192). Martin's delight in the "robust life" of earth (178) and his attempts to capture his vision of the world in drawings give the children an inkling of the variety of possible perceptions of their familiar surroundings, but Wrightson presents this theme through dialogue and authorial comment rather than through action.

In her next novel, Wrightson deals with the same theme of solipsism, but she discards the failed fantasy of Down to Earth, returning to the romantic pastoral of The Rocks of Honey and the romantic child of The Feather Star while retaining an Australian urban setting that is described with an accuracy based upon first-hand acquaintance with the Sydney suburbs of Forest Lodge and Glebe. The strength of I Own the Racecourse! (1968) lies in its "truly original plot" (Townsend Sense 210), for the mentally handicapped Andy Hoddel's belief that he owns Beecham Park (a belief abetted by well-meaning adults) presents his mates with a dilemma that works itself out in the perplexities and actions of the main characters rather than in the abstract argument of Down to Earth. On the one hand, the boys wish to save Andy from being hurt by his apparent delusion; on the other hand, they recognize that it is giving him happiness and a sense of worth. In trying to resolve the issue, the two eldest boys must consider the nature of reality, and at first their views are diametrically opposed. Joe Mooney understands the reality of the racecourse in terms of ownership of things and management of people and animals; Mike O'Day understands the deeper truth that for Andy the racecourse is the colour, light, movement, and sound of the meeting itself. While the issue of perception is serious, Wrightson resolves it through comic disasters that simultaneously sharpen the central dilemma and deflate the self-importance of those who do own the racecourse in Joe Mooney's sense. The comedy of I Own the Racecourse! saves it from earnestness; the comic catastrophes are those of institutions, not individuals, and Andy's friends react to his unwitting acts of insult or sabotage with an unforced mixture of horror and delight.

They can do so because Andy is a privileged, rather than a handicapped person.The complaint that Wrightson's "justification of support for Andy's delusion ... reflects a condescending, even custodial attitude," and that her depiction of Andy offers an unhelpful model for children who may have to face the frustrations of caring for a handicapped person (Sage 107), confuses the values of bibliotherapy and literature, but it does raise the issue of the credibility of Andy Hoddel. Andy is not so much a handicapped child as a human version of Martin, and an older version of Chris Martin and Annie Tippett; he is a romantic innocent whose vision of the world retains the wholeness that others have lost, and whose simplicity brings out the inherent decency in ordinary people. The charge that may more properly be levelled against Wrightson is that of sentimentality rather than that of unhelpfulness, for her characterization of Andy is not such an unqualified success as her plot.

Andy's mental disability confers upon him the romantic attributes of the child whose perception of the world retains an immediacy that offers his friends a new and valuable view of reality and ownership. His status as a romantic innocent is strengthened by his association with nature. Returning to the pastoral of her earlier novels, Wrightson depicts Andy in the locus amoenus of "his favourite patch of ground" (154) or in the open prospect of his "shelf of sandstone" (27) in the cliff from which he sees Beecham Park as a vision of "glowing, lively magic" (26). Wrightson's compelling description of the racecourse and its races offers the reader an insight into Andy's absorption in the spectacle; he retains a young child's capacity for concentration on colour and movement so completely that he leaves his watching friends "surprised and shaken" (76). Because Joe is leaving childhood, he recognizes the difficulty he faces in explaining abstractions to Andy (81), while Andy, unable to put his perception of the racecourse into words for his friends, can "only try to show them" (82) a vital world of processes rather than objects: "misty mornings and horses silently running; rain-soaked mornings and the flashing wings of sea-gulls; warm evenings and leaping dogs" (81-2). Eventually, through the insight of Mike O'Day, the boys come to understand Andy's delight in the race rather than the racecourse (108), in the flight of the model plane rather than in the plane itself (131, 139), and reach a new vision of ownership.

At the same time, Andy's condition is too vaguely defined to be real, and affords an economical way to secure sympathy for him. The association of Andy's handicap with his family circumstances and with an explicit division between the compassionate working class and the mean-spirited rich pushes the novel further into sentimentality, a problem that Wrightson avoids in her characterization of the orphaned Simon in The Nargun and the Stars. The kindness of the boys who care for Andy stems from a strong but sentimental theme of mateship in Australian literature, sometimes, as in the case of Bob Brothers in Lawson's "Send Round the Hat," combining good-natured toughness with a nurturing softness expressed in tending the sick and caring for babies and for overworked women like Mrs Hoddel. As a single parent struggling to raise Andy in a mean little terrace house on her earnings as a dressmaker, she too belongs in the tradition of such Lawson stories as "The Drover's Wife" and "Arvie Aspinall's Alarm Clock."

Wrightson further aligns herself with the predominant socialist-realist school in Australian fiction by making Andy the focus of working class solidarity against the "expensively dressed gentlemen" (127) who run Beecham Park. Sceptical of politicians -- "'Lotta bull,' said Mr Pasan. 'They'll do what they gotta do'" (22) -- and scornful of the wealthy -- "They'll never notice, Bert. They don't care what goes on in the Leger" (125) -- the people of Appington Hill are the "wharf labourers" and "factory hands" who are the urban representatives of Hope's "real" Australians. They are sentimental as well as cynical; they support Andy's delusion and, in the shape of the racecourse workers, provide a painless means of relieving him of it.

The Australianness of the literary antecedents of I Own the Racecourse! is matched by the Australianness of its setting, Wrightson's most assured and comfortable presentation of urban life. She develops the precise glimpses of inner-city landscape that enliven the predominantly tourist's-eye-view of Down to Earth into a detailed and exact setting full of the images and movement of everyday life in the terrace houses, pubs, and streets of Glebe and Forest Lodge and in the grounds of Harold Park Raceway. Not surprisingly, Margery Fisher described Wrightson in 1969 as a "regional" writer whose characters and settings were "unmistakably Australian" (26), and it was with a national and literary awareness that Wrightson took the next step in her course of training: an attempt to write a distinctively Australian fantasy. In so doing, she returns to the pastoral, indigenizing stance of her most consciously nationalist forerunners, the Jindyworobaks.

Though Wrightson uses an inner city setting again in An Older Kind of Magic (1972), this time the original one of the caretakers' "strange sort of village" on the "windy roof-tops" of Sydney's central business district (16), she does so to reject, with all the fervour of the Jindyworobaks, man's separation from nature by the city and its values. Like the Jindyworobaks, she finds an alternative to urban artificiality in a restored connection to the land as exemplified in the Botanical Gardens and personified in creatures drawn from aboriginal folklore. Her first use of the "old things" in An Older Kind of Magic is tentative and limited by the awkwardness of an overloaded plot and the incongruity of the urban setting, but it constitutes the discovery that enables her to create a convincing Australian fantasy in The Nargun and the Stars.

Wrightson's expresses her dislike of the city in heavily figurative language; it is the product of man's self-delusion and hubris, an artificial landscape whose cliffs of masonry and glass mimic a mountain range that pours "rivers of cars down every street and rivers of people into every station" (9), and offers a habitat for artificial animals: trains that "beat at their rails" and buses that "moo and howl" (10). It is "lovely" but "terrible" (90), "a harsh, dead place" (76) that "[treads] heavily down on the land, crushing it under its concrete feet (102). It "[shuts] out the world ... refusing the stars and the moon, and the flat dark waters around it" (22), preferring the spurious magic of appearances to the realities of nature.

The stage magic of Benny Golightly is harmless, but the city holds other forms of magic: that of consumerism, by which make-believe people [show] you how wonderful life [can] be if you [can] pay for it" (40); and that of Public Relations, that works magic "in the only real way: with people's minds" (82). The magic of the camera confers a false reality upon political demonstrations, and the presence of the police makes them "look more exciting" (33). Even the political decision that would destroy the Botanical Gardens, the only remaining natural space in the city, is a matter of appearances, for the capitalist villain of the novel cynically stage-manages a political meeting, conceding that a government minister will "have to make a show" of opposition (79).

Sir Mortimer Wyvern, owner of both the stores and the mass media, is the agent of urban delusion. He is a simply sketched villain whose unrelievedly arid selfishness is as unbelievable as the plot device that disposes of him. Against him Wrightson ranges Selina Potter, the youngest of the three child characters and the only girl in the novel. Selina retains a connection with nature expressed in her love of the Gardens and her interest in animals. Though she can do things "to please" Rupert and Benny, she also has "no trouble in managing her older brother" (6). Her physical skill and decisiveness make her a natural leader, and she is the focus of most of the narrative.

Through Selina, Wrightson offers a romantic connection to the land to balance the stage magic, tawdry salesmanship, political wire-pulling, and selective reporting of the city. Wrightson combines romantic pastoral and a sentimental depiction of childish innocence: in the locus amoenus of the Botanical Gardens, at sunset, hearing the "the wind in the leaves and the wash of the sea," the Minister meets Selina and a new-born kitten, and comes to believe "with all his heart that a car-park in the Gardens [is] a ridiculous idea" (92). To this romantic connection to nature Wrightson adds a fantastic one in the form of the effects of a comet that visits the southern skies for the first time in a thousand years and causes a rash of inexplicable events. The most obviously contrived of these is a demonstration by mannequins that seem to come briefly to life, led by an adult character whose previously developed cynicism is altered by a conversion as unlikely as his possession of the keys to Wyvern's department store.

Both connections to nature are weak, especially the second, and neither is distinctively Australian. Wrightson sought to strengthen the connection by adding the further, indigenizing link to the land that she had first found in the Aboriginal characters of *The Rocks of Honey*. For a tale of magic, she needed fairies rather than human characters; for a consciously Australian tale, she needed Aboriginal fairies. To find them she turned first to the work of the Jindyworobak, Roland Robinson. As editor of the *School Magazine*, she had published some of the brief accounts of contemporary Aboriginal folklore collected in Robinson's *The Feathered Serpent* (1956) and *The Man Who Sold His Dreaming* (1965). From these collections, and later from the anthropological notes in Aldo Massola's *Bunjil's Cave*, she drew the magic of Aboriginal fairies, "spirits not held to be secret or sacred, not involved in creation or preservation but only in the chanciness of daily life" ("Accident" 612). Potentially, such figures combine the fantastic and the romantic in a distinctively Australian manner. In *An Older Kind of Magic* they embody many of the characteristics of Aboriginal people in appearance (137) and language (138). They offer the historicity of creatures who can remember "the bush and the tribes" (137) and the mysticism of a direct connection to the trees, water, and rocks as the spirits and the *verba visibilia* of the natural world.

The problem for the faltering credibility of An Older Kind of Magic is that Wrightson's discovery of the Aboriginal fairies "happened in the middle of the book ("Accident" 613), and that rather than rework the novel, she attempted to shore it up mechanically by introducing the fairies as another element in an already laboured and unlikely plot. They are obviously spliced into the narrative, first as suggestions, then as shapes, and then by name, in some cases with an incident to elucidate their provenance and function. In the case of the Pot-Koorok, an Australian fairy is summoned by the "real" magic of late mediaeval Europe found in Benny's fortuitously-discovered book of spells.

Ancient Aboriginal fairies do not, however, fit comfortably into a modern urban setting. The most successful are the Nyols, whose appearance and voices connect them to the stone with which they are associated, and whose underground habitat affords a credible hiding place. But in the muddy pools of the Botanical Gardens and the drains of the city, and controlled by incongruously European magic, the Pot-Koorok is a diminished and ridiculous figure. The Bitarr seem to be almost gratuitously introduced; and the talking dog that turns Wyvern to stone is little more than a convenient plot device. In An Older Kind of Magic, Wrightson is still experimenting with the figures that will become so important in her later fantasies. Not until the fairies' associations with natural phenomena and with traditional Aboriginal life are made credible by an isolated bushland setting can Wrightson begin to use the "old creatures" effectively as characters and as indigenizing links between human beings and the natural world.

An Older Kind of Magic provides Wrightson with two further lessons in fantasy writing. First, in this novel Wrightson does not refuse to "explain the little details of how things happen" as she did in Down to Earth; rather, she multiplies fantastic details, characters, and incidents with equally unfortunate effects. Second, she further weakens the credibility of the fantasy by hedging. The children are young enough to engage in make-believe, and Wrightson suggests that they have done so: "Benny [agrees] with Rupert and Selina that the whole evening had been only a secret, pretended joke" (147).

Despite its weakness, An Older Kind of Magic constitutes the end of Wrightson's "course of training." It supplies the "ancient creatures of the land" by which Wrightson fuses a romantic view of the Australian landscape with the heroic interior journey to create her first successful Australian fantasy and to attempt an Australian legend. With the exception of the brief Night Outside and the short story "You Can't Keep a Unicorn," all of Wrightson's work since An Older Kind of Magic combines the fantasy, romanticism, rural Australian settings, and indigenizing Aboriginal reference that she began learning to use with the writing of The Crooked Snake, and brings into an effective synthesis in The Nargun and the Stars.

Chapter Three

Hurtling into Freedom: The Nargun and the Stars

The writing of The Nargun and the Stars marks a crucial phase in Wrightson's literary development, because in this novel she solves the problem of credibly introducing fantastic elements into a contemporary Australian setting, and thereby achieves a new and fertile synthesis of the romantic pastoral of Australian literature and the fantastic hero-journey of children's literature. Wrightson's use of the "old creatures" simultaneously constitutes an indigenizing link between man and nature, provides the cause for the hero-journey and the means by which it is conducted, and, in the figure of the Nargun, offers the embodiment of an aspect of the central character's "psychic totality" (Jacobi 106). The effectiveness of Wrightson's synthesis is enhanced by her concentration, in a single, strong narrative line, upon a brief but critical period in the life of a child; by her presentation of a small number of fantastic figures closely identified with natural features; by her use of an underlying motif of silence and sound; and by her relative avoidance of authorial intrusion into the narrative to summarize action or to underscore the significance of events or images.

In The Nargun and the Stars Wrightson builds upon the foundation of seven previously published novels, and she draws upon the strengths she has developed in that earlier work. She returns to the landscape of bush and grazing land in which she feels most at home, in which she can readily make romantic connections between characters and nature, and in which she can establish her recently discovered Aboriginal "fairies" more easily than in an urban setting. She develops human characters firmly based in the Australian literary tradition and in her own experience of rural life, reproducing their behaviour and language with economy and unforced accuracy. (Further, they are characters for whom earlier novels such as The Rocks of Honey have provided studies.) She avoids the difficulty of dealing with sexuality, but maintains the romantic notion of the child's freshness of vision, using a prepubertal child and a child-like, middle-aged brother and sister as the central characters of the novel. She explores the familiar themes of the protagonist's discovery of self in moments of isolation and communion in a natural setting, and of formation of self through facing fear and through acknowledging previously denied aspects of the psyche. She learns from her earlier attempts at fantasy neither to avoid explanations nor to multiply them unnecessarily.

Given such an extensive thematic and technical preparation, one would expect the writing of The Nargun and the Stars to have gone smoothly. Actually, "nothing would go right." Wrightson "wrote the full length of the book in discarded chapters," trying to develop "characters who had been creeping into life for years" and a "setting which [she] knew well and about which [she] wanted to write," all to no avail ("Hurtling" 7). Her difficulty was the one that she had failed to overcome in Down to Earth and An Older Kind of Magic: the credible introduction of fantastic elements into a realistic, contemporary Australian setting.

The Nargun and the Stars belongs to the third of the eight types of fantasy distinguished by Jane Langton. "The two worlds [of fantasy and reality] live side by side. No device is needed ... to escape into the unreal world," the inhabitants of which "live uneasily just out of sight of ordinary human beings" (437). Other writers, such as L.M. Boston, T.H. White, and Alan Garner have written this kind of fantasy, and have used similar means for adding credibility to their fantastic characters: isolated rural settings, the belief of sympathetic but level-headed adult characters, the eagerness of child protagonists to explore the secrets of the setting, and, in the case of such lonely children as Tolly and Maria, to find the comfort of friends. In such settings small figures, similar to Wrightson's Potkoorok, Turongs, and Nyols, can be credibly invisible; larger, benevolent or malevolent figures are generally human, or shape-shifters, or fixed features such as the evil tree called Green Noah, and their motivations are explained in terms of a struggle between forces of good and evil, sometimes human, sometimes legendary, sometimes both.

Though Wongadilla is isolated, Wrightson faces difficulties in introducing her fantastic characters into the setting. The first difficulty is the strictly practical one of presenting the large, mobile, and dangerous figure of the Nargun itself. Australian Aboriginal legend offered her little help: in fact, the entire source of the Nargun is a ten-line entry in Aldo Massola's Bunjil's Cave. Massola describes the

Nargun as being "half human and half animal" and "made of stone" (155); Wrightson chooses to describe it as a creature of stone that can be mistaken for a boulder, thereby removing the necessity for shape-shifting and also establishing an unmistakable link with the land (but altering the Aboriginal source). Wrightson originally intended that the Nargun would be present in the setting and would reveal itself by its cry, and she began with her usual deliberation "to prepare for it -- to emphasize the silence of the country and the sounds that broke it, to give them the value of setting .... But the story wouldn't work" ("Leaf" 184). The problem she faces is obvious: she must explain the motivation of the Nargun and the other "old creatures," and the reason for their presence in Wongadilla.

To explain the motivation of Australian creatures in an Australian setting, Wrightson could not call upon the amalgam of European myth and legend, and the conventions of what Langton calls "Once-Upon-a-Time," the kingdom somewhere in "northern Europe sometime between the fall of Rome and the invention of the internal combustion engine" (437) that underlie the fantasies of such writers as Alan Garner, Lloyd Alexander, Susan Cooper, and, to a lesser extent, Ursula Le Guin. Nor could Wrightson depend upon the standard European theme of a struggle between good and evil to explain the motivation of creatures that do not belong to a European moral tradition. Further, to explain the presence of the "old creatures" in Wongadilla, she could not call upon European history; for white readers, Wongadilla has none of the depth of European family occupation to be found in such settings as Green Knowe and Alderley Edge, and none of the historical and literary associations of Arthurian Britain or Mistress Masham's Repose.

Wrightson's solution to the problem is similar to that of other writers whose background has led them "to alter man's world-view allowing for the integration of an additional continent" (Merrell 7), the Spanish American "magical realists." For Wrightson, as for the magical realists, "the mysterious remains concealed, albeit vitally alive, behind a façade of orderly appearance" (Merrell 6). No action, location, talisman, or unusual combination of events brings the Nargun and the other old creatures to life, nor do they alternate between life and suspended animation like figures of the Arthurian legends. Like the magical realists, Wrightson presents both the supernatural and the natural as normal (Chanady 101) in a culture "situated at the fringes of mainstream literary traditions" (Slemon 10). She presents all the elements of the novel with careful objectivity, opening the novel with a baldly factual statement: "It was night when the Nargun began to leave" (9). In the remainder of the opening chapter her precision in describing the remote and strange landscape of Australia provides a setting in which she can credibly assert the Nargun's age, appearance, mobility, dangerousness, relationship to the earth, and motivation, and can similarly assert the existence of other "ancient creatures" (13). With the matter-of-factness of actual dates, places, and routes, Wrightson provides a believable explanation for the Nargun's being hidden in Wongadilla when Simon arrives there.

Simon Brent comes to Wongadilla feeling "raw all over" (16), as if burnt (cf. German brennen) by the shock of his parents' death; he needs the healing and wholeness that the Waters and the natural setting can offer. As an orphan, Simon is a commonplace character in children's literature, but having deftly and unsentimentally established his isolation, Wrightson uses it as the starting point for a series of journeys of discovery and connection for both Simon and the reader. The Nargun and the Stars is Wrightson's most suspenseful adventure story, but it is also a Bildungsgeschichte that takes place at three levels simultaneously. First, it is a description of Simon's healing through journeys that re-establish his connection with a specifically Australian natural world embodied in the "old creatures" of Wongadilla. Second, it is an account of his personal growth, through journeys with Charlie Waters and an underground journey taken alone, in a setting that allows Wrightson to use the characters and conventions of pastoral. Third, it is a delineation of Simon's psychic growth during a heroic journey that mirrors the first stages of individuation: the processes of rebirth and encounter with the "shadow." Each of these levels receives a different emphasis at different stages of the narrative, the transition in emphasis being marked by a romantic "moment" of awareness, but all three are present at once in Wrightson's brief and fast-moving story.

The narrative moves briskly after an opening chapter that operates in much the same way as the Warrimai interlude in The Rocks of Honey, and with similarly heightened language, to provide readers with knowledge that the characters of the novel must discover for themselves. The spirits of the land are actors in the plot as well as being embodiments of the natural world. They are unpredictable creatures, and dealing with them is risky because they are unwilling to act as allies (98), cannot be bound by European notions of morality (65), and are as easily distracted as children (114). The discovery of the small creatures leaves the reader as "charmed and full of wonder" (39) as Simon; the presentation of a single child protagonist in remote bushland, sometimes at night, coupled with the reader's knowledge of the effects of the Nargun's "sudden, crushing rage" (22), produces the "shivering fantasy" that Wrightson had for so long wanted to write ("Accident" 613). Simon's first encounter with the Nargun in the wet darkness is "genuine scalp-pricking stuff ... of a kind Mrs. Wrightson has never essayed previously" (Crago 38), and the same sense of danger remains even when Simon is not facing the creature alone. He and Edie have every reason to shudder when they see it smash the tractor they have used to torment it (152, 155), and they have every reason to feel relief when, during the faultlessly logical resolution of the plot, they hear it destroy the thundering bulldozer in the blast that walls both monsters inside the mountain. Yet afterwards Simon feels the same intuitive sympathy for the creature that Edie does. The development of that sympathy, and of his closeness to Edie and Charlie, is the result of his own healing and the personal growth that begins with his arrival at Wongadilla.

Simon's first journey takes him from the urban children's home into the "wide and empty" countryside (17) and further still, into the remote silence of the ranges of the upper Hunter Valley. In that setting Wrightson immediately establishes the device of sound and silence that distinguishes Simon from Edie and Charlie at first, and expresses the division between machine-based exploitation of nature based on ignorance, and conservationist stewardship of nature based on understanding. During Simon's first days at Wongadilla he makes journeys to the swamp and to the mountain top that bring him into direct contact with the natural world and with Edie and Charlie, and lead him to delight in the "silence and windy heights" (59) of his new home.

Though the roar of the bulldozer clearing scrub gives Simon his first feeling of familiarity at Wongadilla, the swamp excites his first real interest. His aesthetic appreciation (24) becomes direct contact with nature in the form of the unseen Potkoorok (25), and leads to the slight but genuine human contact of his questions to Charlie (26). The next day's journey to the mountain with Charlie leads to Simon's knowledge that he may inherit Wongadilla (30), to a feeling of awe that restrains him from proclaiming his sense of domination of the land (31), and to a feeling of uneasiness at scratching his name on what he believes to be a large boulder (32). Once again Simon's silence contrasts with the noise of blasting and bulldozing (31); once again Simon's contact with nature leads to the human contact of helping with the chores (34).

Simon makes his second visit to the swamp by choice, preferring its silence to the noise of the bulldozer, encountering the natural world in the form of the Turongs, and meeting the Potkoorok as a result of respecting a life destroyed by a machine (41). His healing has begun; he feels "alive with ... excitement" (43). On his return to the house Edie's prophetic comments about the storm (34) make explicit two important themes: first, that of the active power of the land expressed through its spirit creatures, and second, that of the need to adopt an Aboriginal, rather than a European attitude towards the land.

The first of those themes becomes explicit in Simon's next journey, his dream-like night visit to the swamp, during which he sees, in the actions of the old creatures that have already begun to restore his sense of wholeness, the capacity of the natural world to overcome the machine (47). Wrightson strengthens the links between the spirits and the land by presenting them as expressions of its natural features, altering her original source (as in the case of the Nargun) or adding to sources that offer little information about appearance (as in the case of the Potkoorok, Turongs, and Nyols). The Nargun, which resembles a boulder, has been a part of the Australian continent since the formation of the earth. The Potkoorok, which resembles a frog and sounds like lapping water (57), the Nyols, which sound like the rumble of rocks (110), and the Turongs, which sound like the rustle of leaves (97), have existed since the formation of the natural features (water-courses, caves, and trees) with which they are associated.

The second theme, that of a changed attitude to the land expressed through the indigenizing semiotic field of the old creatures, does not begin to function fully until Simon, in concert with Edie and Charlie, needs the help of the spirits to deal with the threat posed by the Nargun. That development cannot occur until Simon's own healing, including his acceptance of his own mortality, is sufficient to bring him into contact with others and to allow him to direct his concern outwards. His healing occurs most dramatically in a scene in which Wrightson combines a romantic "moment" on the mountain top with Simon's consciousness of nature in the form of the spirits. Rejecting the noise of machines and "interruptions and strangers and excitement," Simon deliberately seeks the silence and solitude that will "restore to him the small old creatures of the land"(59), and while climbing the mountain begins to open himself to the world once more. "Perhaps a cicada feels as Simon [does] when it crawls out of the earth in its tight shell" (60). As he sits in the Nargun's gully high above Wongadilla, Simon experiences a sense of wholeness, feeling "the earth rolling on its way through the sky, and rocks and trees clinging to it, and seas and the strands of rivers pressed to it, and flying birds caught in its net of air" (61). He muses on the nature of the old creatures, accepting that while "[p]eople might come and go," the spirits have "belonged here always" (62). Immediately afterwards, his discovery that the Nargun is not a figment of darkness and his own fear, but a dangerous and powerful creature known to the other old creatures, propels him into literal contact with Charlie (67) and leads to further healing found in the acceptance of love and in laughter (74).

Through his dealings with the old creatures, Simon acquires a new vision of Australia. Though the spirits are primarily expressions of Wrightson's "natural supernaturalism," they are also a way of establishing, by means of the semiotic field of the indigene, the age of the land and the necessity to act as stewards rather than owners of it. Though the spirits are all figures of Aboriginal folklore drawn from Aldo Massola's Bunjil's Cave, their Aboriginal associations, like their natural ones, derive primarily from Wrightson's presentation of them, which uses the vocabulary and turns of phrase of Aboriginal English, and traditional Aboriginal and customs and beliefs. The Nyols refuse to act against the Nargun for totemic reasons expressed in language based upon Aboriginal dialect: "'Stone is our dreaming.' 'That Nargun, that strong stone.' 'Clever stone'" (114); Simon must use a message stick to make formal contact with the Potkoorok and the Turongs, who tell Charlie about the Nargun in a "wind corroboree" (98); and the Potkoorok creates a "dream" of one of the most widespread Aboriginal mythic figures, the Rainbow Snake, to drive the Nyols from their cavern (147).

The creatures also operate within three of Goldie's indigenizing categories. The "orality" of the Potkoorok (expressed in its figurative language and use of titles rather than names) confers an oracular quality upon its presentation of a world view that takes no account of human morality (96) as well as conveying its own pomposity. All the creatures, especially the Nargun (100-101), confer a sense of "historicity" extending backward and forward over immense stretches of time. The Nargun also introduces another of Goldie's categories, that of violence. Yet though it is violent, the Nargun is not malevolent, for it "love[s] men" even when it kills them (77). In learning about the Nargun, the other old creatures, and Wongadilla, Simon must abandon his European belief in ownership of land (93) and his European habit of categorizing creatures as good and evil (65). With the guidance of Charlie's patient observation and Edie's instinctive sympathy, he must arrive at an understanding of the Nargun that includes acceptance of its violence and pity for its displacement and loneliness.

Simon could have achieved none of this understanding without being "carried off out of the world" (20) into the care of Charlie and Edie Waters and into the separate setting of Wongadilla. Wongadilla is a pastoral setting in two senses: it is a "sheep-run in the mountains" (17), but it is also the means by which Wrightson can call upon a long tradition of pastoral literature in Western culture. Charlie and his sister Edie are both the exemplary couple (Poggioli 157) and the "natural celibates" (Auden 411) of the pastoral convention. Their moderation, hard work, frugality, and rejection of greed exemplify traditional pastoral values (Poggioli 150). They show a "strong potential for quietism" (Lerner 148); they accept the bulldozer "politely" (34) and seek to understand and confine the Nargun rather than destroy it. In common with Simon and the amoral, uncomplicated spirits of the land (13), they possess the innocence of childhood (44). Pastoral life has taught them "practical, rather than mystical lessons," helping them to "avoid the dangers of exaggeration and excess" (Poggioli 153); Edie reacts to the cry of the Nargun with "Noise can't hurt" (76), and Charlie begins to deal with the problem of the Nargun's presence by patiently observing the creature (81) rather than reacting hastily.

The enclosed setting concentrates the reader's attention; Wongadilla is a microcosm in which "[t]he troubles seem greater, the joys and pains more dramatic, the pleasures perfect" (Ettin 31). As is typical of pastoral settings, Wongadilla is at once "safe and vulnerable" (Ettin 12); protected by isolation, but subject externally to the depredations of machines and internally to the danger of the Nargun. Although the novel depicts the effects of what Leo Marx calls "the machine in the garden," the remoteness of Wongadilla, the innocence of the child Simon and the childlike Charlie and Edie, and the presence of the ageless creatures of the land make Wongadilla a special place. The "ideal or at least more innocent world is felt to be lost, but not so wholly as to destroy the memory of it or to make some imaginative intercourse between present reality and past perfection impossible" (Marinelli 9). The old creatures that once "lived hidden in a wide world of forests instead of fleeing from one small scrap to the next" (62) can still defend the land and give Simon an imaginative understanding of its age and fragility.

After his moment of illumination on the mountain top, and his discovery that Charlie and Edie know about the old creatures and about his own experiences, Simon feels "the dominant impression of the pastoral environment," that of being at home (Ettin 135). He rejects the noisy exploitativeness of the "machine men" (59) in favour of the silence of the natural world, and also discovers his own ignorance and the depth of knowledge hidden beneath the apparent simplicity of natural features such as the swamp and of characters such as Edie and Charlie. Simon can join with them to celebrate the shared secrets of their home (75) and to defend Wongadilla against the Nargun. He still has much to learn, but now that the healing power of nature has enabled him to re-establish human contact, Edie and Charlie can become his mentors. Without realizing it, Simon begins to take on some of their characteristics. In dress (75) and habits of speech (93), he begins to resemble Charlie; in his intuition (61) and in his sense of pity for the Nargun (106), he begins to resemble Edie. From the more talkative Charlie, Simon learns directly, but from both adults he learns by example.

Charlie Waters, like Wordsworth's shepherd, is "not a Corin of the groves" but "a man / With the most common" who can "teach" and "admonish" Simon once the bereaved boy has resumed contact with other people (1805 Prelude 8.420, 423-4, 425). Charlie is the typical aged shepherd of pastoral who understands the insignificance of man (93) and the timelessness (96) of the landscape (Ettin 153), and can convey to Simon a realistic sense of mortality (93) and of the need to treat the natural world with respect and patience. Such patience does not come naturally to Simon, but from watching Charlie's dealings with the old creatures during the journeys the two take to learn about the Nargun he learns to emulate Charlie's intelligent, calm observation, his acceptance of responsibility, and his courage. Simon shows his learning of all three character traits in his first underground journey to the Nyols' cave.

Charlie knows from experience that the old creatures feel no sense of obligation to man (96). They cannot be forced to co-operate, but must be approached formally (92). They must be treated in a manner that suits the nature of each: with "a threat or a bribe to hold [the] wispy, elusive" Turongs (96); with an appeal to the self-importance of the Potkoorok (135); with a challenge to the Nargun's hatred of machines (130). Simon puts his learning to good use. During his first visit to the Nyols, he throws them his lunch "to buy [the] two minutes in the bulldozer" (117) that he needs to assure himself that the machine is usable. During his second underground journey, he plays upon the Potkoorok's vanity to keep its attention on the task in hand (142).

Simon's underground journeys result from the sense of responsibility heightened by working with Charlie. Their first shared tasks are literally those of "pastoral care": fencing the property (28), and moving the sheep away from the danger of the Nargun (73). Later, in dealing with the old creatures, Simon learns Charlie's sense of stewardship of the land (93). Conscious of his responsibility as

Charlie's successor, and as the person who found the Nargun on the land, Simon insists on behaving in the same way as his elders (105), accepting the risk involved in contacting creatures of which Charlie and Edie know nothing, and overcoming his own fear that there is nothing that can be done about the Nargun.

Charlie does not underestimate the power of the Nargun, a power that makes Simon shudder, but he refuses to be cowed by the Potkoorok's challenge: "What will [you] do with the ground [you stand] on, and the forces and fires that live in it? What will you do with the Nargun, Man?" (101). For Charlie, the solution is to "take another look" (101); to use his practical intelligence to discover what will "send [the Nargun] where it belongs" (106). Simon is "bewildered and almost ready to be angry" that Charlie has "spent a whole day proving that the Nargun shivered when an ordinary stone didn't" (121), but learns the extent of Charlie's courage when helping him test that proof with the tractor (124), and when waiting for him in the darkness of the mountain side on which the enraged Nargun is seeking its tormentors (153).

In learning from Charlie and in helping him, Simon is coming to the end of the "pastoral of childhood" (Marinelli 4) and encountering, "magnified in a new context of simplicity" (Marinelli 11), the responsibilities and limitations of adult life. He has already begun to accept responsibility: strengthened by a second "moment" of unity with the land (109), he has gone to seek the Nyols. His first underground journey is partly involuntary, however, for the Nyols draw him into the mountainside (110). Later, Simon must face the known danger of the Nargun during his first tractor ride and the ordeal of his second underground journey. But he cannot escape danger or the necessity of helping to deal with the Nargun by a retreat into childish day-dreams: by imagining the enjoyment of such a ride taken in normal circumstances (123), or by allowing himself to be "swept away ... on a wave of longing: for a quiet day like this one, but without anything wrong" (135). His decision to accept the responsibility of his second underground journey is free, but it is tempered by his understanding of the responsibilities of others and by his own misgivings (138). Simon's second underground journey marks his departure from childhood; a conscious one, in his assumption of adult responsibility to protect Wongadilla, and an unconscious one, in his confrontation of elements within his own psyche that he would prefer to deny.

In following the Potkoorok into the mountain, Simon is undertaking a heroic journey which, in a variety of guises in the world's myth, legend, and folklore, provides a universal story of human development, a "monomyth," as Campbell calls it (Hero ix). The conventional actions and figures of the hero tale recur in the literature of every age, but in the second half of this century they have most notably been used by Wrightson's predecessors in the writing of children's fantasies: J.R.R. Tolkien, Lloyd Alexander, Alan Garner, and Ursula Le Guin.

Simon's development in The Nargun and the Stars conforms to many of the characteristics of the hero tale noted by W.H. Auden, Lord Raglan, and Joseph Campbell, and discussed by Moss and Stott in The Family of Stories. Like many heroes, Simon is an orphan (Moss and Stott 414), and while he is not nameless, the writing of his name on the Nargun and his assertion before his first underground journey, "I'm Simon Brent, if anyone wants to know. And where my name is, I put it there" (108) makes the issue of naming important (Moss and Stott 414). He is "taught in a pastoral setting by a Wise Old Man" (Moss and Stott 415) in the person of Charlie, who shows him the importance of quiet observation and self-control. Simon shares his greatest adventure with the pompous Potkoorok, which combines the attributes of "fool" and "wise animal" common in the hero tale.

Simon's second and major venture underground is a "night journey" to a "nether world" (Moss and Stott 416); he comes into conflict with "formidable foes" (Moss and Stott 415), the Nargun and his own fear. He descends into the source of the life of Wongadilla, "[t]he birthplace of many streams .... a dreaming of rivers" (143) and also a point of access into the heart of the continent (142). From the womb of the swamp he moves toward "the worst thing he had ever had to do, to force himself," after crawling through a tunnel, "into [a] narrow crack" in which he cannot "see or breathe or move" (142). He slides through, becoming a hero in Campbell's terms, a "man of self-achieved submission" to the process of rebirth (Hero 16). Simon's action saves "the society" of Wongadilla from destruction (Moss and

Stott 416); his courage, like that of an initiate, is rewarded by a vision of the Rainbow Snake.

Simon's journey of rebirth offers child readers an explicit account of his coming of age through undergoing the danger that comes with responsibility, but it also offers an implicit account of his self-discovery and self-formation, for the heroic journey can be seen as a Bildungsgeschichte of the unconscious as well as the conscious mind. In Jungian terms it constitutes a paradigm of individuation, as "the traveler encounters persons and experiences that are ... personifications or projections of something from within his own psyche'" (Mattoon 187-88). The Nargun and the Stars presents a prepubescent child undergoing the first stage of individuation as Simon struggles to come to terms with his "shadow": the unconscious rage, loneliness, and fear of death that turn outwards in his early resentment of the people and the place most likely to help him. Once he has acknowledged the Nargun's existence, however, he can begin to react to it: first with terror like that of nightmare (48), then with denial (53), then with hatred and anger (88), then with pity (106), and finally with "a storm of pity and fear" that Charlie recognizes as Simon's identification with the creature (134).

From the beginning, the Nargun and Simon are closely related: they are both strangers in Wongadilla; the great stone creature literally has Simon's name on it; and the connection between "Simon" and "Peter" or "rock" is commonplace (Matthew 16:18). Further, Simon is first made aware of the Nargun by "the dark places in his mind" (48). In her essay "The Child and the Shadow" Ursula Le Guin argues that a child cannot grow "toward true community, and self-knowledge, and creativity," without facing his "shadow," the part of the psyche that is "all we don't want to, can't admit into our conscious self" (64). The shadow may be a "monster" we "meet ... in our dreams," it may be "primitive, awkward, animallike, childlike," but it is also the "powerful, vital, spontaneous" source of psychic energy (64). The Nargun is a monster that Simon first meets at night; later he is uncertain whether he has dreamed it (49). It is primitive by comparison with the other old creatures; it sees "less, and more deeply" (135); it is without speech, but has enormous strength. Its emotions are simple and powerful: "sudden, sullen rage," "blind uneasiness" (12), "a huge lost loneliness" (89). In time, Simon learns to see the Nargun not as an evil or even as an enemy, but as something that must be contained; he must absorb his own shadow just as Wongadilla encloses the Nargun, recognizing his own individual isolation and need to endure in a universe bereft of the implicit comfort of Christian belief that underlies the fantasies of Tolkien, Lewis, and L'Engle.

In writing The Nargun and the Stars Wrightson uses the "algebra" of fantasy to develop further the post-Christian world view previously sketched in the symbolism of The Feather Star. As noted earlier, Wrightson's view accords closely with that of Ursula Le Guin, whose words in "The Child and the Shadow" apply readily to The Nargun and the Stars. The lessons of the novel are not drawn from the tension between good and evil, but from two other sources: first, the conventions of fairy tale, which reward those who earn the gratitude or help of animals (as Simon earns the gratitude of the frog-like Potkoorok for returning the body of a dead frog to the swamp); and second, from the acceptance of man's position as part rather than master of nature.

For Wrightson, as for Le Guin, the natural world is neither good nor evil, and contains none of the Manichean forces that can make use of humans and animals, as postulated by Susan Cooper in her Dark is Rising series. Wrightson's old creatures, including the Nargun, are as morally neutral as other natural phenomena, and evade Simon's attempt to explain them in terms of good and evil (65). Nor do they feel much obligation to ally themselves with anything as evanescent as man (96), though they too want the Nargun to move. Ultimately, the problem of the Nargun must be solved by human courage and co-operation; the Potkoorok's action, while helpful, is chiefly motivated by vanity, and its involvement is pointless without Simon's free choice to follow the old creature on a journey that tests his courage to the limit.

Individual salvation, for Wrightson and Le Guin, comes from a self unaided by the intervention of such characters as Lewis's Aslan or by special powers such as those of Cooper's "Old Ones." Simon makes his first underground journey partly involuntarily (110), and he agrees to the second in a moment of anger (136), but behind his decision to undertake both journeys lies a recognition of his responsibility for the land (105) and of his kinship with Charlie and Edie as a mortal being whose life depends on that land. Part of the "pity and fear" that Simon feels in coming to understand the Nargun is compassion for human isolation and mortality, including his own, and painful awareness of the bleakly stoical post-Christian creed that the Nargun's endurance exemplifies: the capacity "to bear all age, all emptiness, all evil and good; without hope or despair; with rock-like patience" (134).

Beyond the individual, Wrightson, like Le Guin, posits a world that is not, as C.S. Lewis suggests, a creation placed under the dominion of man, but a self-consistent ecological system evolving since the moment when the earth began "swinging on its moth-flight round the sun" (78) in a silent universe filled with "the cold, forever light of the stars" (128). The confinement of the Nargun is not a triumph of man and machine over nature. Though the Nargun is "the living earth in squat and solid shape" (48), it feels a "fumbling, formless love" (89) for man as part of earth's life, and man is conscious of that feeling (89), even reciprocating it in the form of pity (134). The Nargun also feels "anger or distress" (11) at man's use of machines to alter the rhythms of nature, or, in Le Guin's words, to "shake the balance of the world" (Wizard 56). After destroying both machines set against it, the Nargun is confined rather than defeated, and its confinement is not permanent save in terms of brief human life (158). Rather, as the Potkoorok explains, the Nargun is preserved at the very centre of Wongadilla (159); like Simon's "shadow," it is contained, but not destroyed. For Wrightson, Le Guin, and Cooper, the corollary of acceptance of mortality and rejection of human domination of nature is acceptance of responsibility to preserve the earth, a timely and compelling theme for a Western world "uneasily aware of the fragility of ecological balance" (Dawson 164), and increasingly likely to seek personal and philosophical solace in humanism rather than in Christianity.

The complexity and difficulty of the post-Christian world-view espoused by all three authors raises "the whole question of whether a child's consciousness is an adequate medium for conveying all that writers of fantasy want to say" (Dawson 166). Both Le Guin and Cooper make their views explicit by putting them into the mouths of articulate adults such as the Master Hand of Roke, the adult Ged, or Merriman Lyon. In addition, Le Guin mainly depicts her central characters (Ged, Tenar, and Arren) as adolescents, young adults, or middle-aged people well able to understand and to reflect upon her notions of human existence. Similarly, as Dawson points out, "Cooper feels the need to invent a child who is an Old One" and "his consciousness gradually becomes the most important medium through which the reader experiences the action" (166). In the later novels of the series Cooper tips the balance towards consideration of moral and philosophical issues by dealing increasingly with the lives and concerns of adults.

In the isolated setting of Wongadilla, Wrightson cannot make her world-view explicit with the same ease. Charlie and Edie are not given to philosophizing, and part of their credibility derives from their plainness and taciturnity. Charlie's comments on mortality are brief, and their meaning is implicit; the Potkoorok's comments are limited by its non-human viewpoint; and Wrightson's comments about the Nargun, as well as its symbolic meaning, imply rather than state her opinions. That she is aware of the difficulty is made clear by the tension between her wish to maintain the focus of Simon's consciousness and her attempts to overcome its limitations. She uses imagery: "inside Simon something curled up ... like a leaf in a flame" (100). She suggests a strong sympathy between Simon and the intuitive Edie, drawing a parallel between Simon's discoveries in the swamp and his discovery of Edie's unsuspected depths by using the image of the swamp to describe her (17, 73). Eventually, however, Wrightson is obliged to intrude with comments such as "Simon could not have explained it, but he knew it" (62), or to assume an analytical self-consciousness unlikely in a twelve-year-old boy: "He had always thought it was naked fear, but now he was not sure. It might be naked pity" (155).

Wrightson uses another device to carry some of the novel's more abstract themes. Throughout The Nargun and the Stars, she uses the motif of sound and silence as a means of establishing the Nargun's connection with nature and dislike of human intrusion into it, of setting the machine against nature, and of showing the development of Simon's awareness of the natural world. The silence of Wongadilla frightens and oppresses Simon at first (21), and he welcomes the noise of the bulldozer (23) and the grader (40), but soon he welcomes the silence that belongs with the "small old creatures of the land" (59). Noise is the means by which the Nargun is led into the interior of the mountain in a thunderous climax which sets nature against the machine in the destruction of the tractor and then of the bulldozer. This careful orchestration of sound, similar to the use of insects in A Little Fear, is effective without being obtrusive. On the other hand, Wrightson strains credibility when she postulates a direct relationship between the Nargun and the universe in the interests of emphasizing the interrelatedness of all that exists. It is difficult to believe that the Nargun's anger causes "earth [to] shake on its path ... and the stars [to shake] like beads on their thread of silence" (127).

Still, Wrightson intrudes far less into The Nargun and the Stars than into other novels, and the orphan Simon, though a cliché of children's literature, generally provides the means of maintaining a child's viewpoint in the working out of a logical and fast-moving plot and the simultaneous depiction of crucial psychological development. In the fantasy trilogy following The Nargun and the Stars Wrightson sets out a more explicit and detailed world-view and uses a young adult as the focusing character for most of the narrative, but these changes bring their own problems. On balance, The Nargun and the Stars must stand as one of Patricia Wrightson's most successful novels, because it exploits her strengths of plot construction, description, and language range; because it deals with characters (those too old or too young to require any discussion of sexuality) with whom she feels most at ease; because it is short, encouraging layering of meaning rather than linear exposition; and because it solves the problem of creating credible, indigenizing fantasy in twentieth-century Australia. The Cragos are right in their estimation that Wrightson took "quite a time in coming to a realization of where her ... strengths lie," and that she "felt the pressure to move forward without being sure where it was she should be moving" (39). The Nargun and the Stars, however, is the result of her "conviction that there was a territory to be found," and "her discovery of [that territory] has made the journey worthwhile" (39).

Chapter Four

Impossible Necessity: The Wirrun Trilogy

The Wirrun trilogy consists of the novels The Ice is Coming (1977), The Dark Bright Water (1978), and Behind the Wind (1981). Collectively entitled The Song of Wirrun or The Book of Wirrun, the trilogy is one of the most ambitious undertakings in Australian children's literature, a work in which Wrightson set out to create a "legend in the grand style" of a hero whose fantastic journeys would bring Australians into imaginative contact with their land ("Accident" 617). As an indigenizing legend, the trilogy emulates the work of Wrightson's predecessors in Australian literature, especially Patrick White and Randolph Stow, and as a fantasy its use of magic, its length, its scope and its moral seriousness place its author in the company of such writers as J.R.R. Tolkien, Lloyd Alexander, Susan Cooper, and Ursula Le Guin.

The fantasy of Wrightson's indigenizing legend is, however, quite different from the work of her predecessors and contemporaries in the field, for she writes not of a sub-created world in a vaguely mediaeval past, as Tolkien, Le Guin, and Alexander do, nor of a modern world into which magic flows from a mythic past, as Cooper and Garner do, nor of a modern world linked to a sub-created world by a magical doorway, as C.S. Lewis does in his Narnia novels. Wrightson's fantasy takes place in real locations in twentieth-century Australia, and in writing it she makes use of the descriptive skill and ear for dialogue developed in eight previous novels and of the magical realist technique she first employed in The Nargun and the Stars. She extends the magic of Wongadilla to encompass the whole continent, and adapts the Aboriginal material she had discovered while writing An Older Kind of Magic to the conventions of the fantastic hero-tale and to her own post-Christian world view.

In so doing, Wrightson must rely almost completely upon her own imaginative power, for her sources in the Wirrun trilogy are brief asides in the work of such authors as Roland Robinson, or short, baldly factual notes in the collections of such anthropologists as Aldo Massola. Only in the episodes dealing with Noatch and Balyet and those dealing with Wulgaru does she have the benefit of a little narrative and description found in the memoirs of Ethel Hassell or in Bill Harney's versions of aboriginal stories, and because of her care to adhere scrupulously to the information in her sources, their greater detail is as much hindrance as help. The imaginative sweep and narrative interest of The Song of Wirrun, its strong evocation of a land that is strange to most English-speaking readers and mysterious and magical to many white Australians (Coe 135), and its imaginative, detailed, but unobtrusive use of sources, are considerable achievements that are without parallel in Australian children's literature.

The Wirrun trilogy deals with two kinds of journey, the circular and the linear. The first is a "circular journey of initiation" (Moss and Stott 488) that follows the common pattern of the heroic quest. In The

Ice is Coming, a novel that was originally intended to stand alone, Wirrun's quest begins in the romantic setting of Ko-in's mountain; it ends in the same place, but at the opening of the second volume of the trilogy, The Dark Bright Water, so that Wrightson can establish continuity between the first book of the trilogy and the remainder. During the course of his circular journey Wirrun progresses from his ordinary, even lowly status as an Aboriginal youth, cut off by his upbringing in contemporary urban Australian society from the traditional life and beliefs of his people, to the status of a man initiated into that life and those beliefs. His experience follows the three stages noted by Joseph Campbell in his discussion of Aranda initiation (The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology 116): Wirrun separates himself from the community by his withdrawal to the mountain, is transformed by his experience in the company of spirit creatures, and returns to the mountain and thence to the community in the new role of initiate (Water 35) and potential leader (Water 44). His experience with the spirit creatures takes the conventional form of a quest journey during which he and his spirit helpers, the Mimi (whose appearance and self-proclaimed fearfulness recall Lloyd Alexander's Gwystyl) and the shape-shifting Yabon, race against the Ninya to find the Eldest Nargun. After early defeats, Wirrun and his companions win a decisive battle against the Ninya. As well as the folkloric figures of the helpers, the quest contains the common motif of the crucial importance of helping an old person or an animal. Wirrun's action in helping the ancient, animal-like Bunyip (Ice 136) is crucial to the success of his enterprise, for it takes him to the Eldest Nargun (Ice 167). The close of the circular journey in The Dark Bright Water depicts the rewarding of courage: the Mimi is honoured and assisted on her way home to her country in the far north (19), and Wirrun is honoured and given the whole land for his country (36).

The second, linear journey, which begins with Wirrun's agreement to help Tom Hunter to find out the reason for an alteration in the water supply in the central desert, takes Wirrun into a new world (Moss and Stott 487) in which he undergoes a series of trials that lead to the formation of a new self. His status alters further as a result of his experience in that world. In rescuing his companion from transformation into a beast, Wirrun becomes a "Clever Man" whose understanding of the spirit world surpasses that of Aboriginal elders. In enduring the personal pain of the loss of his best friend and of his spirit wife, and in facing death for the sake of others, Wirrun achieves apotheosis into the spirit world, becoming an Aboriginal culture-hero who has grown beyond the limitations of human existence. His experience with the spirit creatures in this linear journey mirrors his psychological and spiritual development, and leads him to reject the complexity of modern, urban society in favour of what is, for him, the new life of a traditional, nomadic existence in remote areas of the country before his entry into yet another life "behind the wind."

As well as being a fantastic hero tale, however, The Song of Wirrun is an Australian legend, and in creating it Wrightson is emulating the work of such Australian authors as Patrick White and

Randolph Stow. Like them, she relies upon the romantic conventions common in Australian literature; like them, she uses the journey of her protagonists into the interior of the land to represent a journey into the unconscious in the process of individuation and a rejection of materialistic society; like them, she associates indigenization with individuation, and therefore finds herself "face to face with the Aborigine and the land" (Healy 173). In deciding to use the conventions of the fantastic hero tale to embody the process of individuation and to express a post-Christian world-view, Wrightson is also following the lead of such children's fantasy authors as Ursula Le Guin, whose first three Earthsea novels parallel the Wirrun trilogy in their concern with coming of age, sex, and death.

The scale of the Wirrun trilogy, its growth from what was originally intended to be a single novel, and the multiplicity of its themes present structural challenges that Wrightson has not previously faced, and she relies heavily upon linear patterns such as those associated with individuation, the heroic journey, and the romance to hold the trilogy together. Further, Wrightson's decision to couple the Australian legend with the fantastic hero tale presents her with problems of credibility, characterization and language that her predecessors avoid. To these problems she adds two others: the necessity, generated by the attachment of the figures of Aboriginal folklore to specific localities, of moving Wirrun around the whole continent in order to make him an Australian hero; and the self-imposed requirement to remain faithful to the details of her sources in presenting the creatures of Aboriginal folklore. Three further considerations -- the conventions of the hero tale and the analytical psychology based upon it, the "commodities" (Goldie 17) of indigenizing literature, and the age of her central character -- require that she deal with what is, for her, the uneasy issue of sexuality. In the end, the enormous difficulty of the task Wrightson sets herself in The Song of Wirrun overtaxes her capacities, but not without calling forth memorable characters, moments, and settings, and creating in fantasy a compelling vision of the Old South Land.

The common feature of both Australian legend and much heroic fantasy is the pattern succinctly outlined in mythical and alchemical terms by Peter Beatson in his discussion of the work of Patrick White (10-11): the descent of the Above into the embrace of the Below, to attain, often through suffering, the compassion and the acceptance of necessity that enable the Above to ascend to its destiny. In indigenizing legend such as White's Voss, the pattern appears as the descent of an arid soul into vivifying matter, achieving new understanding and life before ascending to new power, and by extension, as "the descent of the spirit of a people into their land, experiencing completely its unknown content of beauty and terror" (Beatson 64). In modern heroic fantasy such as Le Guin's Earthsea novels, the pattern often appears in the terms that Jung uses to apply it to the individual: descent into the unconscious leading to the self-realization that supplants the Christian doctrine of salvation. Both aspects of the pattern appear in the Wirrun trilogy. Although in a letter of January 4, 1990 Wrightson disclaims any direct knowledge of such proponents of the pattern as Jung and Campbell, the pattern of descent into painful knowledge, ascent and apotheosis is so ingrained in myth, legend, folklore, and fantasy that an author who is as interested in those fields as Wrightson could not avoid being influenced by it.

Wirrun's lonely and independent existence, sexual restraint, association with the "power" made of quartz, dislike of contact with Aborigines who wish to meet a hero, refusal of Ularra's help, and unwillingness to accept the necessity of living without Murra (to the point of contemplating suicide) are consonant with Beatson's description of the "Above":

> It is one, single and undivided. It is masculine, virgin and innocent. It is dry, sterile, brittle and devoid of sensuous content. It holds itself aloof from contaminating contact with the flesh, from the carnal relationships that contain both passion and compassion. It is, or seeks to be ... self-sufficient. This emphasis on will ... may be so strong that it creates a desire for disentanglement from the material world that leads to actual or metaphorical suicide. (11)

Murra's identification with her six sisters, her sensuality, her "singing" of Wirrun and initiation of sexual contact, her association with water and location underground, her killing of Ularra, her inability at first to cast off her Yunggamurra nature, the suffering caused by her killing of Ularra and her removal from Wirrun, her acceptance of circumstances that cannot be changed, and the endurance and courage she passes on to Wirrun, all accord with Beatson's description of "that which is Below":

> It is the many .... It is female, moist and rich with sensuous and sensual content. It ... contains a flaw ... that expresses itself through evil, suffering, and death. It is subject to the laws of necessity. It yearns for the descent and embrace of the Above by which it may be liberated ....[T]his embrace may inflict a lethal wound on the Above. Paradoxically, it is only by receiving this wound that the higher principle can fulfil its destiny. (11)

Wrightson also describes the development of Wirrun and of Murra in terms that exactly parallel those of Jung's theory of individuation. In The Ice is Coming Wirrun establishes his "persona" as a Clever Man. Though he refuses the title at first (Ice 60), his name, a combination of "wee-un" and "wirreengun," both names for Clever Men (Robinson, Dreaming 135), his sky journeys, and his association with quartz and a magic cord (Elkin 225), indicate his predisposition to take on the role. Eventually he accepts the appellation and Ko-in's declaration that his experiences in fighting the Ninya have made him an initiate (Water 35). During the course of The Ice is Coming Wirrun also displays a predominant "attitude" and "function," in his case the introversion reflected in his solitary, quiet nature, and the thinking indicated by his planning, by repeated references to him as a thinker

(111, 115, 119), and by his own expression of the need to think (162, 173).

The next stage in Wirrun's individuation is the assimilation of his "shadow," a process that Wrightson depicts by using the common literary convention of joining an unlike but complementary pair similar to Quixote and Sancho or Faust and Wagner. Beside the compact, grave Wirrun, Ularra is tall, loose-limbed, noisy, and inclined to laughter, and his skin is "even darker than Wirrun's" (Ice 31). While Wirrun is thoughtful, controlled, and prudent, Ularra is given to physical enjoyment; is sexually aware, even lustful; is impulsive and generous. But the lust that literally turns Ularra into a beast is in Wirrun too, however much he wishes to deny the dark side of his nature (Water 142, 144). During the final stages of the first journey to find the Yunggamurra, Wirrun's aroused sexuality is obviously shown by the fire-stick and the uncovered, glowing quartz of the power. Ularra follows Wirrun, mirroring his actions (Water 157), while Wrightson's imagery and figurative language transfer to Wirrun the bestial qualities previously shown in Ularra (156-163). The two men are "jammed together in a slit" (161) so closely that Wirrun can sense Ularra's breathing before Ularra acts to save Wirrun (163, 164, 168). In death, Ularra immediately takes on Wirrun's attributes, showing "a man's face, stern and calm" (169); Wirrun takes on Ularra's attributes, those of the opposite "functional and attitudinal type" (Jacobi 107) to which Wirrun belongs. He gives way to anger (Water 178); finds strength in feeling rather than thinking; and turns outward to explain his situation to Merv Bula (180). From this point onward, and with additional clarity after "[t]he water-spirit disturb[s] his thinking" (194), Wirrun's extroversion and capacity to feel steadily develop.

Wirrun's second underground journey (without the fire-stick, and carrying the power wrapped in its cord) results in the liberation of the Yunggamurra. It is also an encounter with "the contrasexual part of the psyche" (Jacobi 111) that is "his strength and purpose and power, ... all that he need[s]" (Water 169). He begins the journey "surrounded by a number of female figures" (Jacobi 116), but dismisses them and returns to the Yunggamurra, which Wrightson presents in terms remarkably like those Demaris Wehr uses to describe the Jungian "anima": "'She' ... seduces, lures, attracts, even imperils a man. 'She' compels him to enter the unconscious. 'She' also leads him into unexplored depths of feeling, relationship, and sensitivity when he allows 'her' to do so" (66). Similarly, Wirrun's leading the Yunggamurra into the unwelcome light in which it cannot see at first, but in which it weeps (Water 189) in the first stages of acquiring a self, closely parallels Wehr's description of the "animus" as providing "a guiding light, an ability to focus, a clarity of thought, precision, and analytic ability ..." (67). In the light of the outside world, the Yunggamurra begins to think (Water 195, 197) rather than feel.

Murra undergoes her own, female journey of individuation, similar to that outlined in Annis Pratt's discussion of rebirth and transformation in Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction. Murra is separated from the close-knit group of her sisters, is guided into an idyllic green world by Wirrun, who also becomes her "green-world lover" (Pratt 140). She confronts the sisters who do not share her sense of self, eventually making a choice "between her secret self and all that [is] sweet for a Yunggamurra" (Wind 89), and travelling in search of "a way down underground to the old water" (90-91) in a deliberate plunge into the unconscious (Pratt 141). After a dangerous journey of rebirth (Pratt 142), during which she experiences what Carol Christ (13) calls "nothingness" (Water 92), she awakens in the care of nature (Christ 13) in the form of He-of-the-Long-Grass, who embodies the land for her and for Wirrun (Water 130), and is also the Jungian Wise Old Man. He-of-the-Long-Grass combines the spirituality and the understanding of nature that Jung associates with man and woman respectively (Jacobi 121).

Both Wirrun and Murra achieve self-realization. He recognizes that she does not "need [her sisters] any more, or Wirrun-and-Murra either" (Wind 132); she freely chooses the painful task of watching over his body, her love helping to release him from death (Pratt 167). Wirrun faces the fear of death in the shape of Wulgaru, overcomes his apparent annihilation through the assertion of self (Water 148), and returns to share with Murra the fruits of the achievement of self in a life beyond what Jung sees as the limited existence of the individual ego (Jacobi 125).

For Wrightson, as for Le Guin, self-realization is the end of human life. Through her depiction of Aboriginal people, spirits, and beliefs, Wrightson presents, as a kind of natural religion, a post-

Christian world view that regards humankind as outgrowths of nature itself (Ice 11), death as a return to nature (Water 178), and self-realization as the highest good (Wind 148). Through the character of Wulgaru she warns against what Le Guin calls "the little traitor soul in us" (Shore 135) composed of man's "knowing of evil, [his] power, [his] greed, [his] fear" (Wind 66). Wrightson explicitly rejects what she presents as two outgrowths of that "traitor soul": the selfish, amoral materialism of the Happy Folk (Wind 122), and the man-made but "tormenting hazard" (Wind 113) of Christian notions of sin and retribution in an afterlife. Wulgaru's view of things (Wind 77) is as arid and bitter as that of Abel in The Feather Star; against it Wrightson sets "life and more of it, lived more freely" (Wind 126) in terms like those Ged uses in talking to Arren: "Look at this land; look about you. This is your kingdom, the kingdom of life. This is your immortality" (Shore 165). Wrightson and Le Guin see humankind as a mortal part of a self-consistent universe, and argue that salvation lies in the self-realization that allows acceptance of that belief and the consequences flowing from it: preservation of the earth rather than exploitation of it, symbiosis rather than domination -- both features of the idealized Aboriginal life that Wrightson portrays in the Wirrun trilogy and in The Rocks of Honey, and both ideas expressed in The Feather Star and The Nargun and the Stars.

In addition to the Jungian pattern of individuation, the trilogy follows the related pattern of the hero tale most clearly outlined by Joseph Campbell in The Hero with a Thousand Faces. Wirrun becomes a "man of self-achieved submission" (Campbell 16) to the tasks that result in his rebirth as a hero, and he is able "to battle past his personal and local limitations" (19) as an uninitiated youth and a member of a marginalized group to become a Clever Man whose power is not limited to a particular part of the country. Wirrun is called to adventure but at first refuses the call (36); he moves into a mysterious liminal zone inhabited by strange beings (58); he accepts the call to adventure and is helped by fatherly and motherly figures in the form of Ko-in and the Mimi (73); and he receives an amulet (the "power") from Ko-in (69). Wirrun then undergoes a series of trials including a night sea-journey with the bunyip (245) and a decisive battle with the Ninya. These trials are equivalent to initiation, and immediately Wirrun begins the process of meeting the goddess (36) in which woman is both temptress and wife. He learns to comprehend and to serve her, "[n]ot by the animal desire of an Actaeon, not by the fastidious revulsion of such as Fergus ... but only by gentleness" (118). The hieros gamos of Wirrun and Murra is blissful and playful, but is cut short by her return to her sisters. With the help of Murra, however, Wirrun faces Wulgaru (131), in the process denying the existence of a punitive god and of sin (130), and as a result achieves apotheosis, having "gone beyond the last terrors of ignorance" (151) to the understanding that suffering is "completely validated in the majesty of Being" (147). Wirrun and Murra then live forever in a blessed state (193).

A less obvious pattern also underlies the trilogy. Its volumes follow the phases of myth described in Northrop Frye's Fables of Identity (16). Wirrun begins his first journey towards becoming a hero, and acquires a fatherly and a motherly helper in late spring (Ice 14); he marries his companion and bride in the pastoral, idyllic world of summer (Water 11); and he faces her loss and his own isolation and death in the darkening days of autumn (Wind 3).

While such complete and readily perceived patterns do provide a structure for the trilogy, the unbroken linearity of Wrightson's use of them creates problems of narrative and characterization not encountered in a comparable fantastic account of individuation, Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea series. Each of Le Guin's novels deals with an aspect of individuation, but does so in a single, self-contained narrative with the single focus of a main character, the structure that permitted the layering of meaning in The Nargun and the Stars. In addition, the age and experience of Le Guin's main characters, whose lives in the series stretch from birth to late middle age, allow her to suggest that they have a rich inner life and memory, and a personal and social existence that extends beyond the immediate concerns of the novel.

By contrast, Wrightson splits her narrative. Some of this narrative division results from Wrightson's solution to the problem of creating a credible fantasy in a modern, realistic setting, a problem that Le Guin does not face. In the Wirrun trilogy Wrightson adopts the magical-realist strategy that she uses so effectively in The Nargun and the Stars: the assertion of the existence of "a race of creatures from the land itself" (Ice 12) coupled with an opening narrative involving one of them. The first two volumes of the trilogy open with the stories of the Mimi and of the Yunggamurra; the third opens with the assertion of the existence of an unknown power in the north-east of the continent through the narrative of Jimmy Ginger. In each case, the strategy is a successful means of establishing the possibility of fantasy in the remote setting of the Australian bush, but in each case Wrightson cannot turn to the story of the protagonist until the existence of the spirit-creatures is firmly established.

Of itself, a divided narrative need not create difficulties, but Wrightson does not always manage it well. She draws her accounts of the Mimi and Wirrun together by means of a double coincidence (Ice 20, 62); brings Wirrun into contact with the Yunggamurra in a similar way (Water 38, 147); and breaks the story of Wirrun's search for Wulgaru by inserting a compressed account of Murra's female journey towards self-realization (Wind 85-93). Rather than layering and suggesting meaning, Wrightson occasionally returns to the intrusive techniques of her earlier novels, summarizing action directly (Water 84, Wind 52), commenting on the meaning of action (Water 216), and using italicized cues as a reminder to the reader of the significance of preceding statements by characters (Water 141, Wind 139).

Unlike Le Guin's Ged and Tenar, Wrightson's Wirrun and Murra have little life beyond the confines of the trilogy. Wrightson does not describe Wirrun's development as a child and cannot describe Murra's development, since until her transformation by Wirrun, Murra has had no human experience. Further, Wrightson's decision to present an unbroken account of their individuation does not allow for the implied growth and reflection between childhood and middle age that enriches Le Guin's characters in the Earthsea novels. Wrightson's explicit use of the pattern of the hero tale also presents Wirrun primarily as "the man who climbs the rugged track to hero" (Water 177), and in her characterization of him Wrightson shows his development towards the abstraction of the heroic role and away from the more contingent and human attributes of a young urban Aborigine. (Wrightson's minor characters, however, have a humanity that some of the less important inhabitants of Earthsea lack. Her skill with dialogue adds depth to rapid but effective sketching of the dignity and simplicity of Johnny Wuthergul, Tom Hunter, and Merv Bula, and to the wry humour of Derby).

Wrightson's narrative choices are not, however, the main cause of her difficulties of characterization. Not only does she attempt what Goldie calls "the impossible necessity" of indigenization (13), but she attempts it in a heroic fantasy using a contemporary setting. Her indigenizing intentions and her use of Aboriginal folklore to underpin the magic of her fantasy make her choice of an Aboriginal hero logical; her previous writing experience and the limitations placed upon women in Aboriginal religious life make her choice of a young male protagonist advisable; her conscious care, expressed in a letter of September 4, 1990, always to use published Aboriginal folklore, but never "without 'bleeding' it into contemporary times" makes her choice of a contemporary setting inevitable. The triple requirement to present Wirrun as a credible, contemporary Aboriginal Australian, to depict him as a hero according to the conventions of the fantastic hero tale, and to show him as "a sort of bridge between white men, People, earth-things, the lot" (Wind 44) creates a tension that Wrightson cannot always resolve successfully. Part of her approach to the problem is to couple the conventions of the Australian interior journey and those of the hero tale, and to set the bulk of Wirrun's story in increasingly remote areas of Australia; part is to use the spirit-creatures of Aboriginal folklore as figures in the essentially European heroic romance. Neither strategy is completely successful, and each creates difficulties of its own.

As a relatively uneducated young man "to whom thinking [comes] more easily than talking" (Ice 18), and as a contemporary inhabitant of a city in the most densely populated part of Australia, Wirrun is a character whose motivation is not easily depicted. By contrast, Stow's Heriot and White's Voss are protagonists whose relationship to nature is the romantic connection of dominant, articulate, adult Europeans of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to a strange landscape, the harshness of which tests and develops them psychologically, and calls their beliefs into question. The motivation for their journeys is clear and credible. In general, both men wish to turn away from the society that falls short of their ideals;

in particular, Heriot wishes to escape his own guilt and the society of the remote mission station he has himself built up after what he believes to be his murder of Stephen, and Voss wishes to develop beyond the self-satisfied mediocrity of the east coast by pitting his will against the power of the land in a nineteenth-century journey of exploration. Le Guin's Ged develops to adulthood in contact with adult figures who explain the workings of the sub-created world he inhabits and of which he himself expresses a deep and articulate knowledge. His motivation in the first three Earthsea novels is also clear, arising from the necessity to act to save himself or others. In the Wirrun trilogy, however, the reader knows little of Wirrun's inner life and previous experience, and his motivation for undertaking his quests is not as clear as that of such characters as Voss, Heriot, or Ged because, especially at first, he is not personally affected by events and is not mentally prepared for them. In each subsequent quest Wirrun is more convincingly drawn into the action because the reader knows more of his experience. Still, his initial action in The Ice is Coming and the actions of the Ninya against whom he fights lack a sense of compulsion and urgency. Similarly, Wirrun's being "sung" by the Yunggamurra has little immediate relevance at the beginning of his second quest, which he undertakes primarily to help Tom Hunter and his people, and secondarily to rescue Ularra from "the circles of the Happy Folk" (Water 52). This latter motivation is like that of the heroes of the Australian interior journey, who reject the society of the coast in favour of the simplicity and purity of the harsh inland.

Wirrun possesses the attributes of a traditional hero (Moss and Stott 414-16) in a contemporary Australian setting. His origins are mysterious, or at least not explained; he is a lonely figure who lives by himself in a rented room; he has unusual powers, though at first he knows only "that he like[s] to walk on the earth in lonely places" (Ice 18); he becomes a wanderer by turning his back on the city "to live free in the old way" (Wind 7) and to contact the spirit creatures of the whole country; he is almost always engaged in a quest to help the land, the People, or the spirits; he overcomes increasingly arduous tasks until his untimely death at the hands of Wulgaru. Heroic attributes expressed in these terms are acceptable, but difficult to characterize in a contemporary setting.

The disjunction between the conventions of the heroic romance and the realities of contemporary Australian life appears most clearly in dialogue. As a young Aboriginal service station attendant, Wirrun maintains his own demotic Aboriginal English throughout the trilogy, even in conversation with the spirit-creatures, which are themselves distinguished by language. Those most like the figures of heroic romance, such as Ko-in, the Mimi, Wulgaru, and the Yunggamurra, speak in a heightened, literary idiom; those most directly presented as outgrowths of the land, such as Kooleen's wives, the Wa-tha-gun-darl, and the Dinderi, speak in a more strongly marked form of Aboriginal English than Wirrun's. The two styles of dialogue are discordant when used by a single character: Murra speaks in heightened, abstract terms when most spirit-like (Water

214) and in language more like Wirrun's when most human (Wind 29). To balance this, however, there are times when Wrightson's use of the disparity between the heroic and demotic styles is quite daring, as when Wirrun's unthinking words confirm his relationship to the spirit-creatures: "'And thanks, man --' He stopped, confused .... Ko-in chuckled. 'Goodbye, Man'" (Ice 72). Further, as Emrys Evans points out, this "ordinary greeting here implies Wirrun's maturation, from youth to man, without the customary rites, but by special benediction and through the force of circumstances" (170).

Wirrun's credibility as a hero is increased when he turns his back on the white cities and towns to travel in a confidently realized but remote landscape "observed ... as if through the eyes of one of those Australian landscape painters who shook themselves free of European traditions, and began to see the southern flora and the geology of Australia as it really is" (Evans 166). Wrightson's descriptions of the topography are precise enough to enable the reader to place the action precisely on the Australian continent as her characters journey above it (Ice 115, Wind 22), and she can also convey particular (and for many readers exotic) landscape, such as dry sclerophyll forest (Ice 45) or rainforest (Wind 23), with exactitude. It is possible, in a still largely empty continent, to avoid contact with the white towns and cities of the eastern seaboard, and even there the dissected plateaux of the Dividing Range offer barely accessible havens even more remote than Wongadilla. Wrightson's land is both real and strange, ancient and contemporary, and allows the possibility of Wirrun's discussing Wulgaru in colloquial terms near that most ordinary of twentieth-century places, the highway and its cars, before his journey into the lonely bush to face the spirit among the ancient grave sites.

Wulgaru and the other spirit-creatures of the Wirrun trilogy (save for the invented shadows of the "First Dark") are drawn from the same kinds of sources as their predecessors in The Nargun and the Stars. Unlike those predecessors, however, they are not verba visibilia, extensions of the landscape like the Turongs or Nyols or the Nargun itself. They are figures of Aboriginal folklore from all over the continent, pressed into service as actors in a heroic romance and as spirits of a belief system consonant with Wrightson's stance among those who "view indigenous religion as a positive emanation of nature" (Goldie 132). The creatures can be "recognized by the only slightly less indigenous Aborigines" (Goldie 136), but by nobody else, a convention that assists in maintaining the credibility of the spirits in a contemporary setting. To bring the spirit creatures into contact with more than a tiny number of people, and to depict them as being active throughout the country rather than in an isolated, small area such as Wongadilla, Wrightson must postulate their being recognized by people who are scattered throughout the country, especially in its interior, yet who are sufficiently isolated from the majority of the population to preserve the secrecy needed to sustain fantasy in a contemporary setting. The Aborigines, to whose folklore the spirits belong; who are scattered throughout the land, even in its least hospitable places; and who are isolated by distance, culture and distrust from the white majority, are the people best suited on logical as well as indigenizing grounds to furnish the human characters of the trilogy. Given the limitations placed upon young men and upon women in Aboriginal religion, Wrightson's main human characters are, naturally, male Aboriginal elders. Further, she must present the bulk of the narrative from the viewpoint of an Aboriginal male, and an urban, contemporary one at that. Consequently, she is obliged to account for the white majority of the population and to present a distinctively Aboriginal view of the land and of the events of the novel. The first obligation is difficult to attain, the second well-nigh impossible.

The most successful of the spirit-creatures in the trilogy are those most like the "old things" of The Nargun and the Stars in their association with the landscape, or those that most closely parallel the figures of more conventional quest fantasy. The Narguns, Nyols, Wa-tha-gun-darl, and Yauruks of The Ice is Coming are connected to nature by appearance and talk; Ko-yo-rowen, Yaho, and Puttikan embody the terrors of the night in grotesquely convincing fashion. Interestingly, all of these figures come from The Ice is Coming, the novel immediately following The Nargun and the Stars. Some other minor spirit-creatures, however, are little more than names that seem to have been added to the narrative almost gratuitously (Wind 90); others (Wind 71) are primarily the means of transporting Wirrun around the whole continent and of confirming his right to claim the entire land as his country (a requirement of the intensely local nature of Aboriginal belief to which Wrightson scrupulously adheres).

The Mimi, a frail, unlikely, but humorous helper; Ko-in, a harsh but fatherly guardian; and Wulgaru, a calmly mocking but dangerous adversary, are among the most compelling of the remaining spirit-creatures. All speak in the idiom of heroic fantasy; all have parallels in the work of Alexander and Tolkien, for example. Yet each of these creatures is distinctly Australian too: each belongs to the ancient landscape and its indigenous people, and each uses the figurative language based upon natural, Aboriginal life that Wrightson first developed in The Rocks of Honey. Similarly, though the transformation of the "fairy wife" into a woman and Wirrun's three tests in the cave of Wulgaru parallel events in European folktale, Wrightson's use of Aboriginal material provides the telling details that transform the conventional into the arrestingly new:

> He held her over the small licking flames and saw strips of dried slime fall away and burn. He watched with hard disgust something more horrible: a million tiny leeches crawl from the pores of her skin to fall into the flames. (Water 204)
>
> It sat sprawled on a stone in the firelight. Its head and body were cut from a tree-trunk, its arms and legs from branches. Its joints were round river-stones tied with red-painted string. Its face was a clumsy mask like those he had seen before but greater and more terrible ....

> Wulgaru suddenly opened its jaws and snapped them shut with a sound that rang in the cavern. Then it lifted its head and looked at him, and its eyes blazed white like the terrible stars (Wind 141-42).

It is worth noting that in her use of sources for such descriptions as these, Wrightson is scrupulously careful to retain whatever detail they afford. Her main source for the second and third volumes of the Wirrun trilogy is Bill Harney's Tales from the Aborigines, and Wrightson takes material from what seem to be unpromising stories expressed in a style that mimics the pidgin English of Northern Territory Aborigines of the first half of this century, and transforms it into description that seems to have been entirely and effortlessly imagined.

While Wirrun meets the Yunggamurra and Wulgaru in the remote interior of the continent, he also lives in twentieth-century urban Australia, and Wrightson must account for the white majority of its people. Her solution is to simplify, for The Song of Wirrun "is not a real-life story but a legend. Legends do not go in for sociological studies. They take a simplified view of reality, flow over it and sweep on to the magic" ("Professionalist" 6). Wrightson's three "races": Aboriginal "People," rural "Inlanders," and urban "Happy Folk," carry on the Jindyworobak practice of elevating the Aborigines to the position of true guardians of the land and of asserting strongly inward-looking nationalism, and the more general Australian literary practice of valuing straightforward rural characters above urban sophisticates.

The "waspish axe-grinding or even selective irony" ("Professionalist" 6) in her depiction of the Happy Folk, against which Wrightson feels obliged to defend herself, is not a serious problem, though she is heavy-handed and even peevish in characterizing them (Ice 30, 89). Rather, the problem is that of simplification itself. Types of people, even separate races (such as Tolkien's elves, hobbits, men, and dwarves) are common enough in sub-created worlds, but the credibility of Wrightson's "magical realist" technique proceeds from the assertion that everything in the trilogy, including the spirit-creatures, actually exists in contemporary Australia. Her reference to the "echo of old wars" (Ice 195) between Aborigines and Inlanders is honest, and her depiction of the ill-feeling of rural Australians for their urban relatives resembles that of Les Murray's "Sydney and the Bush." But the contradiction between the variousness and complication of the "arithmetic" of realism and the simplifying power of the "algebra" of fantasy remains, and is unresolvable. Her reduction of human characters to types, and her presentation of all white town-dwellers of the eastern seaboard as being unrelievedly stupid and of all Inlanders as being shrewdly perceptive is unrealistic and is largely abandoned in the second and third volumes of the trilogy.

By contrast, her presentation of the Aborigines as being unconsciously joined to the land is also unrealistic, but is required by the semiotic field of the indigenizing legend she is quite deliberately attempting. That semiotic field characterizes the Aborigine in the terms discussed by Terry Goldie in Fear and Temptation. Some of these "commodities" Wrightson has used comfortably before in The Rocks of Honey: mysticism, orality, closeness to nature, and prehistoric connection to the land. On the other hand, the field also presents the Aborigine in terms of sexuality and violence, commodities with which Wrightson is distinctly ill at ease.

Wirrun's first contact with the land and its spirits begins in a manner as romantic as that of his predecessors in Wrightson's work: in communion with nature, on a mountain, at dawn (Ice 47), and his declaration of care for the land (Ice 59), like the Mimi's declaration of the importance of the microcosm of a rock pool (Ice 222-23), exemplifies what Abrams calls "the breakthrough from sensual to imaginative seeing" (390) underlying the romantic valuing of the small and humble. Wrightson opens the trilogy, however, with a simplification of that romantic relationship with nature: the assertion of a direct, mystical connection between Aborigines and the land (Ice 11) that appears in Wirrun as intuitive awareness of the landscape: "At first he thought like a bushman .... After a time it seemed he had stopped thinking at all; or perhaps he was thinking with his feet" (Ice 46).

As an Aborigine, Wirrun is also as close to nature as a man can come; he is formed by the land like the spirits themselves, but, unlike them, he is able "to care" (Ice 132). He is also, as Manyweathers points out (91), able to abandon the "frenzy" (Ice 89) of the white way of living and thinking for the unanalytical acceptance of the land that Wrightson describes as "dreaming" (Ice 95). Goldie's commodity of orality applies to Wirrun also, for the land speaks to him directly (Ice 47) and the Yunggamurra "sings" him (Water 38) in a manner resembling the use of djarada or love-magic by Northern Territory Aboriginal women (Harney and Elkin 177). Wirrun chooses "to live free in the old way" (Wind 7), and though he does not completely renounce contact with contemporary white Australia, his wandering pastoral life with Murra is idyllic, unlike that in the "shanties on the edges of towns" (Wind 33) in which many of today's Aborigines live. The idealized naturalness and simplicity of Aboriginal people and life that Wrightson presents are, to use Goldie's terms, "an affirmation of 'undomesticated' wholeness" (36) that she has made before in The Rocks of Honey, but in depicting the sexuality of the Yunggamurra / Murra, Wirrun, and Ularra, she is far less comfortable and consistent.

This discomfort may be because sexuality "is perhaps the most complicated of the standard commodities of the indigene, seldom employed without ambivalence," whereas "reaction to the violent indigene is usually negative" (Goldie 67). Certainly Wrightson's view of the sexuality of the Yunggamurra / Murra is complicated, while her presentation of male sexuality in the case of Wirrun (and even more emphatically in that of Ularra) is deeply imbued with violence. Apart from being an anima figure, Murra has four other functions, some of them contradictory, all of them discernible in Goldie's discussion of the maiden in indigenizing literature: she is depicted as a symbol of the land, as an object of male desire, as a source of danger, and as a devoted companion and protector.

The Yunggamurra is an emanation of the land because it is one of its spirits, and is also located at the heart of the land itself, in the "First Darkness." In possessing Murra, Wirrun finds an end to his loneliness and a home in the land, "her world of freedom and the old ways of his People" (Water 223). Murra fits Goldie's description of "the maiden as restorative pastoral," and though she does not represent "new, available land" (16), she does represent a return to an Edenic, idealized existence. Before possessing her, however, Wirrun must actually create her by turning her into a human being (Water 204), an action that serves to emphasize her status as an object of desire. The Yunggamurra, and later, Murra, conform exactly to John Berger's description of the female image in western art. As Berger says, "men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (47). Wrightson describes the Yunggamurra in strongly visual, erotic terms (Water 164, 188, 193), but also describes the Yunggamurra as "watching herself being looked at" and enjoying the sexual excitement of deliberately enticing men (Water 167-68) in a manner that extends the manipulative female behaviour noted in Wrightson's earlier work into the temptation that Goldie argues is the first of two "poles of attraction and repulsion" in indigenizing literature (15). The other pole is "the fear ... of violence" (15) at the hands of indigenous males, and this fear becomes entangled, in Wrightson's view of sexuality, with ambivalence about sex itself. For Wrightson, in the Wirrun trilogy at least, sexuality is expressed as rape following temptation, or as playful idyll; there is no middle ground.

Male sexuality in the spirit world is that of the coarse Dulugar (Ice 129) or the unlawful desire of Kooleen that is frustrated by his jealous wives (Water 166). In the human world, male sexuality is polarized between Ularra's animality and Wirrun's heroic self-control. Ularra's lust (Water 79) develops into an attraction to the Abuba (Water 104) that literally turns him into a beast (Water 112), and, even after his return to human form, leads to thoughts of rape (Water 132). Wirrun, too, has "no power over himself" at first (Water 173); only Ularra's death saves him from the Yunggamurra. Even after he has changed the spirit-creature into Murra, his self-control and her apparent innocence barely prevent him from deciding to "drag her off into the bushes" (Water 212, 218). The "gentleness" prescribed in Joseph Campbell's description of the hero (Hero 118) appears more clearly in Behind the Wind.

Female sexuality in the spirit world is manipulative and dangerous. The Bagini, Mungga-Mungga, and Abuba all deliberately attract men to destroy them, though admittedly these figures may, in traditional Aboriginal folklore, be a means of dissuading young men from breaking the law (Harney 39). In characterizing the earth-creature turned human, the Yunggamurra / Murra, Wrightson shows a deep ambivalence about sexuality that does not coincide with the duality of spirit and human. As a spirit, the Yunggamurra, like other female earth-creatures, entices men to destroy them. Wrightson presents this action as an unconscious, instinctive one, yet she consistently adds a moral dimension to it. The Yunggamurra's "evil love-singing" is "sweet bad mischief" and "old sweet wickedness" (Water 82, 165, 166), but the creature itself is "an earth-thing, wild and lovely and free of evil" (Water 200). As a human, Murra possesses the attributes of a child in her innocence and playfulness (Water 212), and of an independent and courageous woman who freely chooses to protect Wirrun (Wind 131). The expression of her sexuality, however, is not consonant with either childishness or maturity. Wirrun is "almost sure" that she is unaware of the effect of her "teasing" voice (Water 212), but Wrightson's description of Murra's watching "wickedly" while pretending to have forgotten her clothing, and of the way in which Wirrun's "restraint and shyness [puzzle] her" (Water 217), leave little doubt of Murra's self-awareness. Eventually it is Murra, "leaning forward and singing, smiling her wild-honey smile and teasing with her eyes" (Water 223) who leads Wirrun into the sexual activity that Wrightson never attempts to portray. Even though Murra and Wirrun make a free choice, it is she who leads Wirrun into the water in which she has said she should not be to do something he has said he should not do, an action for which they both suffer.

In the end, the trilogy endorses respect for the safety and freedom of one's partner, acceptance of risk and pain in helping one's partner, and mutual love: all of which constitutes an admirable and credible basis for the relationship of a couple who are "truly man and wife" (Wind 152). Sexuality that is violent, manipulative, or merely playful does not belong in such a relationship, but Wrightson does not deal with sexuality in any other terms in the trilogy. In fact, she never describes sexual activity at all, and after The Song of Wirrun she returns to characters and situations in which the issue of sexuality does not arise, as in A Little Fear and Moon-Dark, or in which it is marginal, as in Balyet.

Nevertheless, the final scenes of Behind the Wind bring to a satisfying close the love-story of Wirrun and Murra and the hero-tale of Wirrun's self-formation, and embody Wrightson's post-Christian view of the supreme value of unselfish, individual human endurance in the face of inevitable pain and loss. Murra expresses that inevitability before she is taken from Wirrun, and does so in terms of a self-consistent universe:

> There is the land from which we are both made, you and I, and does it not keep its own laws? Once it raised itself up and swallowed seas; they lie under it still .... It had proud rivers and tall forests then. See it now, this land, tired and old, worn down with sun and wind; for that is the law of lands. Am I more than the land? Must I not keep its old laws? (Wind 22)

Wirrun's assertion of endurance is also expressed in a view of the land:

> The tired heights circled their secret valleys; stranded rivers vanished into hidden, guarded waters. The rough old rock was wearing into soil, the trees turned their grey

> leaves edge-on to the sun. He said soberly, "She don't give in, any rate; she creeps back another way." (Wind 22)

The loss of Murra, however, leads Wirrun into the resentment and self-pity castigated by Ko-in, who prompts Wirrun to the unwilling and fumbling affirmation of independent selfhood (49) that Wirrun repeats more forcibly in his defiance of Wulgaru (122) and of death (148). Having accepted the inevitability of his own death (67) and refused the selfish solution of suicide (84), Wirrun learns from Murra's example to endure the loneliness and unavoidable pain of life in unselfish service (97). His request for Murra's help brings them the pain of remembrance and of the possibility of further loss (131), but she freely chooses to help him in a final battle in which the best of him faces the worst of him (66) in the form of Wulgaru, and he pits his courage against the knowledge of evil, the desire for power, the greed, and the fear (66) that demean humankind. She brings him the help of the land itself in the form of cakes of nardoo, sustenance gathered from the hardy desert grass. In the fear and desolation of death, Wirrun is confirmed in his awareness of self by "the love of Ko-in, the trust of Ularra, the faith of the golden Yunggamurra" (148), and he returns to her having passed through death into a more abundant life (150) as an Aboriginal hero, like those whose "stone bodies [lie] in warning or in promise while they themselves [live] on; behind the wind ..." (153), and in the legends of the Aboriginal people.

As an indigenizing Australian legend in the form of a heroic fantasy, The Song of Wirrun is unprecedented, but despite its foundation in the Australian literary tradition and its similarity in scope and moral seriousness to Le Guin's Earthsea novels, it is not always successful because its complexity makes demands that are sometimes beyond Wrightson's capacities. Her strengths in imagining the characters and stories that grow from an Australian setting cannot overcome the inherent difficulties of mixing fantasy and realism and of using Aboriginal material in the essentially European genre of heroic romance; her problems in constructing a long narrative and in meeting the special requirements of her material lead her to seek the support of inhibiting linear structures and intrusive authorial comment and summary. Emrys Evans's suggestion (166) could be turned into an assertion -- that "in the end we shall judge her, on the strength of books like The Nargun and the Stars ... and A Little Fear, ... to be better as a miniaturist than as an epic poet."

Chapter Five

Liberty and Limitation: A Little Fear, Moon-Dark, and Balyet

Since completing The Song of Wirrun, Patricia Wrightson has continued to experiment with forms she has not previously attempted in the manner that has marked all her work, and to explore human individuation in the way begun in The Nargun and the Stars and continued in the Wirrun trilogy. Of her three most recent novels, one is an account of self-discovery in the isolation of a pastoral setting, one is what might be called an ecological fable, and one is a contemporary re-telling of a legend. The central human characters in all three are elderly people, two of them women. Wrightson has also made a twofold return: a literary one, to the short fantasy novel using Aboriginal folklore, and a personal one, to the north coast district of New South Wales in which she has spent more than half her life. The first return has enabled Wrightson to reclaim the characteristics that contributed much to the success of The Nargun and the Stars: a single, clearly focused narrative in which Aboriginal spirit creatures provide an indigenizing connection to the landscape and motivate the plot. These characteristics offer similar strengths to A Little Fear and Moon-Dark. The second return, to a landscape she knows intimately, has allowed Wrightson to attempt in the same two novels the new development of animal fantasy combining Aboriginal material with a European understanding of ecological balance. Her most recent novel, Balyet, set in the south-west of the continent, is also a return (though a less successful one) to a fundamental proposition of The Song of Wirrun: that Aboriginal people have a mystical relationship with the land. In Balyet Wrightson presents that relationship in its active form. Granny Willet's ceremonies are increase rites that sustain the land, and her faithfulness in continuing the ceremonies enables her to contact the spirit-world and to release from punishment one of the ancient Aboriginal inhabitants of her country. The sources of the Aboriginal material in Wrightson's last two novels are legends explaining the natural phenomena of the waxing and waning moon and of the echo. Wrightson attempts to adapt this legendary material to fit contemporary themes: in Moon-Dark, that of the effects of ecological imbalance; in Balyet, that of the conflict between old and young in a changing society. The presentation of figures of Aboriginal legend for these purposes and in a modern setting causes serious difficulties in both novels, and in Balyet leads Wrightson well beyond retelling the legend and into an enlargement of it that depends upon her own version of Aboriginal religious beliefs.

Of Wrightson's three most recent novels, A Little Fear is most like The Nargun and the Stars and shares many of its strengths. The isolated setting of A Little Fear allows Wrightson to use the magical realist technique to assert the existence of spirit-creatures and to generate suspense as the protagonist discovers what the reader already knows. In this instance, she is able to use the reader's knowledge to exploit the pathos of Mrs. Tucker's fear of senility and the humour of Hector's damaged pride, while also using the character of the Njimbin to embody, in the narrative of its struggle with Mrs. Tucker, the capacity of the land to defeat an intruder.

Mrs. Tucker is an original and interesting figure whose predicament is saved from sentimentality by Wrightson's characterization of her. Agnes Tucker is hardly the ideal grandmother of children's literature, in the mould of L.M. Boston's Mrs. Oldknow. Her tall, raw-boned frame, "tiny white moustache" (5-6), "bellowing laugh" (28) and "bunioned feet" (5) are no more attractive than her irritability (6) and slyness (7) and her manipulativeness (9). If she is slowing down mentally (6), she is aware of the fact, and is still tough and assertive (6). Given her age and self-assurance, one would not expect her to be the protagonist in a Bildungsgeschichte, but she is, in a novel that proceeds, like The Nargun and the Stars, on three levels simultaneously. First, A Little Fear deals with Mrs. Tucker's growth through endurance in a struggle against a creature whose temperament and circumstances closely resemble her own. Second, the novel offers an account of her loss of illusions during her withdrawal into a pastoral setting that is consonant with late twentieth-century views of nature. Third, the novel presents Mrs. Tucker's psychic growth in the later stages of the process of individuation. Such layering and suggestion of meaning and interlocking of the elements of plot, setting, and character, coupled with a relative lack of authorial intrusion, show Patricia Wrightson at her best: as a miniaturist whose powers are concentrated by a circumscribed setting and by brevity.

The Clarence estuary near Maclean offers a distinct topography remote enough to sustain the credibility of Wrightson's "magical realist" style of fantasy, especially since she has largely invented the spirit-creatures of the novel and can link them closely to natural features. John Bright's old cottage, within a few miles of a small town, yet isolated on a ridge leading down to the river, is a believable home for Mrs. Tucker. The surrounding land could readily hide a small spirit, "grey like stone and gnarled like an old root with age" (37); small rafts of twigs, leaves, and grass, drifting with wind and tide or caught in branches above the water, could just as easily be Hairy Men; and the scrub and blady-grass growing rankly among the trees in the humid sub-tropical heat of summer and early autumn rustles with all kinds of animal and reptile life and swarms with insects.

The Njimbin is the source of motivation in a cleverly original plot, but also embodies the land: directly, in its resentment of intrusion, adaptation to the presence of man, and use of teeming, tiny forms of life against an interloper who will not submit to management; and indirectly, through the indigenizing associations of its Aboriginal appearance and weapons. Since Mrs. Tucker is a European, however, she brings with her none of the difficulties inherent in presenting an Aboriginal point of view. The insect life of A Little Fear, like the silence of The Nargun and the Stars, provides a motif underlying the whole novel and marking the climax in the clash of wills between a closely matched pair: the Njimbin and Agnes Tucker. Hector, the rats, and the fowls also help to shift the focus of the novel from the human to the more broadly biological, and are studies for the full-blown animal characters of Moon-Dark.

In the small-scale but hard-fought conflict that constitutes the bulk of the narrative, Agnes Tucker and the Njimbin are well matched. Both of them want the security of a place they can call their own, one in which they can live on their own terms. Both of them are manipulative: Mrs. Tucker consciously turns the good nature of other people to her own ends (8,9) and shrewdly uses written (93) and spoken (108) language to bend her daughter to her will; the Njimbin uses introduced sources of food and shelter, manages the rats as if they were its own livestock (12), and "[puts] on an injured tone" (96) to achieve its ends. Both of them are irritable (6, 46), especially with weaker characters such as Helen or the fowls; both hate to look foolish (65,69) or to admit defeat (84, 106). After a victory, both are self-satisfied; after a defeat, both are unforgiving (97, 111).

Though in the end Mrs. Tucker leaves the cottage, her endurance in the battle against the Njimbin is rewarded. When the novel begins she is in the dependent position of an "aged child" (9), and seeks an escape that her granddaughter understands: "'You're going to run away, aren't you?' she whispered, one child to another" (7). Later, however, strengthened by the freedom to pursue her own interests in her own time, Mrs. Tucker does not run away from the cottage, despite the fear of senility caused by the Njimbin's tactics in the battle for control of the fowlhouse. She faces her fear, discovering the Njimbin's fire (70) and her burnt traps (72), and confronting the Hairy Man (90). She even begins to recognize the Njimbin's right to shelter and independence, and thinks of seeking an accommodation with it (93) until young Ivan's action provokes the midge-storm that finally defeats her. In defeat, however, Mrs. Tucker attains a realistic perception of her loneliness and need of others (109). The independence she has acquired from her endurance at the cottage and her negotiating skill secure for her the maximum freedom possible within her limitations. She is no longer running away into dreams of an ideal past, but level-headedly planning for a possible future.

By calling into question the reality of Agnes Tucker's distant memory of a dairy farm as "the right picture" of a "good life, hard and lonely and free" (7), Wrightson is also calling into question the version of pastoral that "enables us to live, on our own terms, with a nature we have abandoned" (Rosenmayer 118). A Little Fear is founded on the belated but necessary realization, in the late twentieth century, that human beings are as much part of an interdependent nature as its tiniest and least-considered creatures. Agnes Tucker's time in the pastoral world, like Simon Brent's, is one of learning, testing, and self-discovery leading to acceptance of her mortality and a clearer understanding of her place in the scheme of things. She arrives at this end, however, after an experience that is almost the opposite of Simon's.

The Australian world of Wongadilla, like the European world of Green Knowe, is a romantic one in which "natural supernaturalism" leads to healing. Simon is brought into the pastoral setting, begins by hating it and wanting to hold on to the urban values he has brought with him, but ends by finding a home in it. Though Wongadilla contains the terrifying Nargun, it also communicates itself to Simon in deeply satisfying moments of awareness and companionship, and in discoveries that fill him with "delight" (55) similar to that of Tolly and Ping in the pastoral world of Green Knowe.

Mrs. Tucker runs away to the pastoral world hoping to find in the cottage and its surroundings the pleasures and pains of simplicity and independence that she recalls from her younger days, but ends by discovering that she cannot live without human companionship and help in "a place that [doesn't] know her or want her" (109). She does not achieve a sense of wholeness through Wordsworthian moments of self-awareness or through co-operation with the spirits of the land, but through defeat in a battle against manifestations of "natural supernaturalism," and through recognition of her place as part of an ecological system that accommodates her grudgingly. The natural world of A Little Fear is capable, in time, of overwhelming her, just as it threatens to overwhelm the lonely cottage whose "tired old frame" (105) represents her own.

In coming to the cottage, Agnes Tucker is entering a landscape that has been settled almost from the beginning of white colonization and is more accessible than Wongadilla. From the outset, however, Wrightson makes clear the indifference and potential hostility to man of this Australian setting. Here there is none of the comforting depth of human occupation found in the European pastoral settings of such writers as Alan Garner, Penelope Lively, or L.M. Boston. This is a landscape without stone walls, churches, clocks, small fields, trades, or music, but also without the sustaining company of people like Edie and Charlie, and the pleasure of creatures like the Potkoorok. The countryside is almost empty of human life, houses are sparsely scattered and hidden by ridges or distance, and in "the hard heat of January" (10) John Bright's old cottage waits in "glassy silence spun from the shrilling of cicadas" (11) for the bushfire that will inevitably destroy it. The landscape of A Little Fear has defeated European man; it has been "cleared and farmed and deserted," and "the forest [is] now struggling back" (10). Among the natural and supernatural creatures of this world, unsentimental predation or self-interested management are normal, and introduced species such as lemon, peach, and cassia are most subject to attack (11). At first, Hector understands its nature better than his mistress does. What she sees as a place for a garden, he recognizes as the territory of creatures "furred and scaled and skinned; hopping, wriggling, running; eaters of leaves and insects and flesh" (22).

Mrs. Tucker brings into this world the values of conventional pastoral. She looks forward to the simplicity of living in two rooms (17), the independence of using tools (19), and the self-sufficiency of a vegetable garden (19). She enjoys the beauty of butterflies (18) and the fun of Hector's cautious approach to a frog (24). The reality of the natural world soon asserts itself, however; "it [begins] to seem a waste of time to plant" seeds (26) when her vegetables are nibbled or taken outright. She turns her attention to the fowl run, which can at least be enclosed, but in so doing incurs the anger of the Njimbin. Even without the help of the old spirit, the realities of this pastoral setting begin to undermine Mrs. Tucker's expectations. The once-amusing frogs become noisy inhabitants of her cottage (43), and along with plants and insects become puzzlingly deceptive (48). The startling camouflage of a moth, "all its symmetry and shape cunningly hidden," turns her puzzlement into fear: "It was suddenly frightening, this sly concealment of shape. It meant that anything could really be something else" (51).

The cumulative power of the "tide of fluttering wings" (52) and the constant movement of life in the darkness outside the cottage and even within its walls bears down upon her, but she cannot hide from it (52) or ignore it (60), and begins to feel that she is "the intruder" in the cottage (69). When Mrs. Tucker angers the Njimbin, the land's indifference turns to hostility expressed in the inexorable power of its teeming life. Ants nest in her food, her plants, even her bed. Frogs invade every corner of her cottage, and a "midge-storm" (104) finally engulfs the building completely. The pastoral world of A Little Fear destroys the illusions of Mrs. Tucker's memories of a land dominated by hard work and youth. Though she still has the courage to face the little fears of insects and frogs, and the greater one her own senility, she recognizes the truth that at best she has the choice of accepting a constrained rather than a dominant place in the world of the cottage, and that "old and alone" she cannot "fight a war against the land" (105).

This recognition is itself dependent upon a process that according to Jung "is not a task of youth but of mature years" (Jacobi 119): that of "attaining a broader personality that may be regarded as a preparation for death" (Jacobi 105). As a result of her endurance, Agnes Tucker grows in self-knowledge; through encountering the "cold, impersonal truth of nature" (Jacobi 121), she becomes aware of the power of her unconscious, instinctive desire (Jacobi 127) for a life lived on her own terms. In so doing, she achieves a detachment that enables her to seek an accommodation with her circumstances and to plan her future realistically.

Though Agnes Tucker is not a child character, she is certainly able to endure and to grow. Throughout the process of settling into the cottage and contending with discomfort, loss, and outright fear, she undergoes a development similar to that leading to what Jung calls "self-realization." This development requires acceptance of "the contrasexual aspect of [one's] psyche" (Jacobi 120); recognition of the "archetypal figure" that represents the spiritual principle (a discovery that often leads to "hubris") (Jacobi 121); and a transforming recognition of the power of the unconscious that can lead to self-knowledge. Through Agnes Tucker, Wrightson examines individual growth in the latter part of life in detail, after presenting a complete but abnormally compressed account of individuation in The Song of Wirrun. In A Little Fear, however, Wrightson's depiction of the process is a third level of meaning within the novel; it is a part of plot and characterization, not a structure imposed upon the narrative.

Agnes Tucker's journey of self-realization is that of an older woman who, in Annis Pratt's words, wishes "to integrate herself with herself and not with a society she has found inimical to her desires" (136). Mrs. Tucker deliberately plans and executes her escape from the retirement village, leaving its society for a solitary life, turning in upon herself in the cottage that mirrors her in its age and isolation. In it she can live as she pleases, and she begins her new life by integrating her male and female attributes.

From the opening of the novel, Wrightson stresses Mrs. Tucker's masculinity: her height and her "large-boned frame," her "tiny white moustache," and the assertiveness signalled by her posture and manner (5-6). Life at the cottage enables her to make use of this masculinity. She wears her brother's clothes; uses his hand tools as she has always wanted to do; and takes out his boat (30-31). Such recognition and acceptance of the masculine side of her nature leads to "enrichment" and "broadening" of her personality (Jacobi 120). She laughs "in a hearty bellow that would have surprised the staff at

Sunset House" (24), and begins to plan for the future and to assert her occupation of the land by buying fowls for the long-abandoned fowlhouse. She knowingly integrates her masculine and feminine sides; before going to town she dresses "in the sort of clothes that old ladies are expected to wear" and "[dabs] a little powder on her moustache" (31).

Her refusal to give in to the fear of senile dementia during her battle with the Njimbin for control of the fowlhouse leads her to the next stage in her growth, because "it is precisely the endurance of tension, the ability to hold out in the midst of psychic disorder, that provides the possibility of a new psychic order" (Jacobi 124). She proves to herself the existence of the Njimbin, and recognizes in it the personification of the "cold, impersonal truth of nature" (Jacobi 121). This recognition is vital in the female individuation process, and Wrightson emphasizes it in one of the most intrusive pieces of commentary in the novel:

> [S]he felt that in some unseen way she knew this thing very well: a secret, ancient thing, small yet somehow immense and unknowable. It had to do, she thought, with the impertinence of rats and the disregard of ants; with fragile lime-green butterflies that ate up a whole tree; with the implacability of night, that rejected her but lay in wait for her cottage lights; with the sudden strong voices of frogs living hidden in pipes and gutters that she thought were only hers; even with the inscrutability

> of a twisted bit of paperbark that was really a living moth. All these things were in some way a part of this one small thing, and this thing challenged her. (77)

In her conscious knowledge of the Njimbin, a creature that in so many ways resembles her, Agnes Tucker underestimates its power and succumbs to the "danger of becoming arrogant and vainglorious" (Jacobi 122). She challenges the Njimbin by setting up the earth-creature's axe "in plain sight" (78), and by locking the fowlhouse, thereby gaining the "small victory" (88) of an egg. She has yet to reach the next stage of growth: the self-realization that requires her to accept what Jung calls "the animal impulses of the unconscious without identifying [herself] with them and without 'running away'" (Psychology and Alchemy 138).

Mrs. Tucker encounters these animal impulses in the form of the Hairy Man. Her experience in the cottage has given her greater strength of mind and capacity for self-analysis than she has ever had before (89). In spite of her astonishment, anger, and fear at seeing the Hairy Man leave the most private recess of the cottage when it comes "shambling out of her bedroom as if it [owns] the place," Mrs. Tucker enters the cottage without conscious thought (90),and faces the creature. It is unafraid of Hector or of her, and is absorbed in the "animal impulse" of eating live frogs, but when she confronts it, "[s]omething -- a sense of pity or of fellowship -- [flows] between them" (90). Once she has encountered the Hairy Man, and has conceded its ability to deal more effectively than she can with one of her problems, Agnes Tucker sees her real enemy for the first time (91). Her reaction after sighting the Njimbin is to make explicit her understanding of it (91) and to accept its presence and that of the Hairy Man in the cottage. She wrongly believes that she knows what the Njimbin is like (91), and considers the possibility of co-existence (93). Mrs. Tucker has yet to attain self-realization, which requires that she solve the problem of her relation to "outward and inner reality" (Jacobi 123).

In the suffocating horror of the midge-storm that brings to a climax the motif of insect life Wrightson has used throughout the novel, Mrs. Tucker learns what distinguishes her from the Njimbin. She is mortal. She cannot exclude or see beyond the midges that she has already associated with time (88); she can kill them, but they are "momentary things" (102) that die readily and are immediately replaced, like ticking seconds. She realizes "despairingly" that "nothing [makes] a difference" to them (102), and learns from Hector to endure them, though his inarticulate companionship cannot make any contact with her conscious mind (104). After a night spent in the attitude of death, without the comfort of light and shrouded "from head to foot" (104) under a rug, she emerges into a scene that mirrors her own position. In an autumn morning in which "threatening" columns of midges are still forming, she contemplates the cottage, "alone in a landscape swarming with unseen life, its tired old frame vulnerable to rats and frogs and snakes and midges and fire" (105). She now knows her position as a mortal part of a larger reality that she cannot control, nature itself. She seeks and achieves a way of life that involves the worries and problems that are "the natural attributes of all human existence, the normal counterpole ... of happiness" (Jacobi 124) -- attributes that Sunset House denied her, but that the cottage gave back. She is precisely aware of her situation and of her feelings (109). Her final acts are realistic assertions of her individuality: gathering the tools she will need in an independent future, planning to "go out with a bang" (111) in her vendetta against the Njimbin, and beginning to "make a dog" (31) of Hector by eradicating his fear of water.

A Little Fear contains Wrightson's first experiments with fantastic animal characters. They provide much of the humour of the novel, but also give the reader a non-human insight into the place of man in the ecological system. Wrightson matches the limited talk of frogs and fowls to their natural sounds, and deftly characterizes the hysterical hens and pompous rooster through dialogue. The rats' ironical politeness is not so obviously the talk of animals, but it provides a counterpoise for the Njimbin's boastfulness. Hector says little, but his lugubriously pacific nature and fear of water, so oddly matched with his heroic name, and his clumsy but sincere efforts to help Mrs. Tucker, provide the comedy that saves her predicament from being too threatening. Wrightson also uses Hector to reveal the Njimbin to Mrs. Tucker and to form a bridge between human and animal world in a manner explored more fully in _Moon-Dark_. In that novel Wrightson develops the technique of characterization through dialogue to a high pitch, and centres the narrative upon an animal character.

Presenting most of the action of Moon-Dark through the consciousness of that quintessentially Australian domestic animal, the cattle dog Blue, is an ambitious undertaking, but the novel as a whole is even more ambitious. It mixes contemporary ecological fable, requiring development of a cast of animal characters and provision of much incidental information, and an indigenizing narrative depicting the intervention of an Aboriginal moon-hero to solve the problem of ecological imbalance. Despite the slow pace caused by the need to supply information, the ecological fable succeeds in part, especially in its characterization of Blue and the other animals, but Wrightson's depiction of Keeting and his intervention in the contemporary Australian world brings with it insuperable problems of theme, plot, and characterization.

Wrightson's choice of Blue as the narrative focus of the novel makes possible a credible and detailed description of the busy nocturnal life of the gullies and ridges along the Clarence estuary. This is the landscape of A Little Fear, but seen afresh through animal eyes. Blue's wild heritage (18, 35) and his nightly forays into the isolated pocket of untouched bush surrounding the cottage make him a part of its life in a way that the town-bred Hector never could be. At the same time, his understanding of man's ways and speech enables him to interpret the setting in human terms and to suggest solutions, in a way that wild animals cannot, to the problems of an ecosystem in which human occupation is an unavoidable reality. In Blue, Wrightson creates a full and unsentimental animal character whose intelligence is acute but limited (73, 75), whose memory is erratic and easily overridden by excitement (40, 75), whose swagger leads him into foolishness (61, 118), whose inexperience leads him into danger (77), whose devotion is balanced by self-interest (33), and whose curiosity provides a believable source of much of the information that readers require. He is officious but good-hearted; he earns his vision of Keeting and Keeting's praise, for unlike the cat that claims superiority to wild animals (73), Blue fights to protect them from a feral dog (84-5).

Wrightson deals with the potentially difficult problem of Blue's language by giving him the dialect of an Australian male, similar to that of Mort and the Ranger, whose language he understands (10) but with whom he does not communicate more than is necessary (9), and then only through "body-language." Most other animals in Moon-Dark are also given a language much more complete than the onomatopoeic talk of the fowls and frogs of A Little Fear, yet each has a distinct way of speaking. There are close parallels in this regard between Moon-Dark and Russell Hoban's The Mouse and his Child, in which animal characters are differentiated by their use of variations of the local human dialect, and in which the warring shrews shout slogans at each other much as the rats and bandicoots do in Moon-Dark (46). In ordinary speech the rats and bandicoots use a slightly non-standard dialect (112), the wallabies a consciously genteel tone enhanced by careful politeness, the koalas a pompously orotund phraseology (102) or an outraged roar (131), the cat a sneeringly superior style (55) that becomes a terrified yowl, "Lemme in, cancha, lemme in!" when it is nearly cornered by Blue (117). There are also creatures, such as the Powerful Owl (114) and the carpet snake (71, 136), whose talk is more onomatopoeic, but they have little to say. The majority of animals, on the other hand, have much to say, for they have to resolve a conflict between necessity and law created by man's destruction of the habitat of the flying foxes.

Any author who writes of a world of animals, especially an author of Patricia Wrightson's generation, is likely to fall under the long shadow of Rudyard Kipling. The animal world of Moon-Dark resembles that of the Mowgli stories in its unflinching presentation of predation (25, 75), of salutary violence (60-61), and of the terror of potential prey (114). Wrightson also espouses values that Kipling would approve. Co-operative effort that draws upon the special skills of each group of animal and the transformation of enmity to "grudging respect" for "haggard, earnest efficiency" (104) are basic themes in much of Kipling's work, in short stories ("Servants of the Queen"), verse ("The Ballad of East and West"), and novels (Kim). Further, Wrightson's interest in factual detail and her techniques of transmitting such detail recall Kipling's. She notes the peculiarities of the koala's feet and pouch in an insult (30); explains the temperament of planigales in a carefully noted and biblically cadenced irony (92-93); describes the capabilities of wallabies in a list of features that

Blue admires or envies (23); and catches the sound of the bandicoot ("a hard, angry squeak like a rubber toy") with humour and exactitude (28). The strongest echo of Kipling, however, occurs in references to law. The rules of Wrightson's animals world appear as adage (43) or as game (24), but she expresses serious law in terms very similar (75) to those of the "Outsong" of the second Jungle Book, or in the words of Keeting (87), whose heightened style of speech resembles that of Bagheera, Baloo, and the wolves.

Despite such similarities, Wrightson's late twentieth-century experience leads to a different conception of the place of man in the natural world, a conception that affects the plot and characterization in Moon-Dark. Kipling's animal world, like that of nineteenth-century India, is a hierarchical one. Hathi the elephant ranks highest, followed by predators such as Bagheera, Kaa, the wolves, and Shere Khan. Prey such as buck come lower in the order, with the foolish monkeys and sycophantic jackal lowest of all. Mowgli becomes a leader in this hierarchy because, as a man, he has the natural capacity to impose his will upon animals and the intelligence to learn, to remember, and to plan. Kipling depicts other humans as white hunters able to dominate the jungle to bring retribution for man-killing, or as Indian villagers ignorant of jungle life and superstitious about it, but no more able than the monkeys they so closely resemble to do any real harm to the jungle animals. Wrightson's animal society, however, in keeping with late twentieth-century perceptions, is an ecological system in which "nothing [can] happen to one ... without happening to

... all" (43) including man; and solutions require the co-operation of all. Wrightson's grasp of the relationship between the availability of types of vegetation and animal survival is detailed, accurate, and generally unobtrusive (89); she also makes clear the reality of animal adaptation to ecological changes caused by human activity (88). As in *The Nargun and the Stars*, the main issue of *Moon-Dark* is not one of morality but one of territoriality. Though the Ranger is a custodian, he can do no more than mitigate the effects of human action. Since Wrightson cannot credibly call upon a human or animal character to find a new home for the displaced flying foxes, she must postulate a supernatural power that can do so. Her use of the moon-hero Keeting for this purpose weakens the central themes of mutual responsibility and the need for co-operative action (though Keeting insists upon both), and leads to insuperable difficulties of plot and characterization.

Once Wrightson has completely introduced Keeting, a little more than half way through the novel, there can be no doubt, given his heroic status, that he will solve the problem upon which the plot is founded. Keeting's action as a kind of *deus ex natura* relieves man of the consequences of a man-made problem. Further, planning the tactics required to ensure that Keeting will not be seen by humans and assigning the task of cutting and transporting bamboo have the effect of summarizing the action of the following chapters before it occurs. Though the consequent loss of suspense does not seriously affect the humour involved in the execution of the plan or the depiction of the co-operation of previously warring groups, the extent of the reader's foreknowledge detracts from the power of the narrative as a whole.

Because Keeting is the moon, highly visible, closer to legendary status than any of the Aboriginal spirits in her work, and universally known, he belongs in the lowest of three levels of Aboriginal material Wrightson distinguishes; she cannot "re-create" his story, she can only, "with authority, retell or enlarge on it" ("Cultures" 190). She cannot, therefore, assert his existence in a contemporary setting as readily as she can in the case of more limited and local earth-creatures such as the Njimbin or even the Nargun. Her method of introducing Keeting is the more cumbersome one she abandoned in The Nargun and the Stars: Keeting reveals himself by sound and light, much as the Nargun was originally intended to reveal itself by its cry. Blue's first intimation of Keeting's existence occurs in the familiar romantic setting of a "broadened gully ... filled with mist" that shines "with a silver-gilt glow like moonlight" (19). At his second appearance, Keeting's chant (based on an Aboriginal legend that explains the dark of the moon by saying that he descends into the sea to swim with his sister the dugong) speaks to the "need and fear" (59) of the small wallaby. Here, Keeting is a localized figure presented through the consciousness of animal characters, and Wrightson makes use of the Aboriginal notion that all creatures were men at the time of making (86) and the legend that Keeting was carried to the sea by Bracken and Bladygrass before becoming the moon (83) in order to connect Keeting to all the animals and plants of the land. At the same time, however, she must account for his status and power, and does so by presenting him as a kind of demi-god, somewhat akin to Kenneth Grahame's Pan in The Wind in the Willows, who cares for animals that speak about "Him" (113) as reverently as Rat speaks about "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn."

The combination of Aboriginal reference and animal consciousness succeeds, for the most part, despite the incongruities caused by Keeting's semi-divine status. His chant about the dugong (58-59) contains the indigenizing detail that supports the notion of the fellowship of all former men and the assertion that Keeting's "first making" (86) was in an Aboriginal past more remote than any spoken of by other human groups (138-39). Even the use of bamboo canes to transport the flying foxes, a detail drawn from a story about Kunmanggur the rainbow snake, in Roland Robinson's The Feather Serpent (10-11), is credible in its setting. Keeting's contemporaneity and universality, however, create problems of characterization ranging from the avoidable to the insurmountable.

Difficulties caused by Keeting's songs are partly avoidable. The second, in which he sings of his kinship to the dugong, and even the fourth, in which he explains his identity in terms of the myths of ancient Mesopotamia and Greece and the folklore of Europe and Asia, suit Keeting's status and circumstances. On the other hand, the first song, which could be that of a tipsy contemporary local European who blends popular music, reference to Edgar Allan Poe, and Lear's verse for his own amusement, and the third, which speaks of clouds in the language of children's verse and directly mocks the Ranger, are both incongruous with Keeting's Aboriginal characteristics and his place as a culture-hero. Both songs could be revised to match Keeting's Aboriginal characteristics more closely; they may be remnants of the original (and quite different) first draft of the novel.

The requirements of contemporaneity and universality, however, bring with them insoluble difficulties. The animals, including Blue, cannot credibly conceive of Keeting as anything more than an Aboriginal hero with quasi-divine attributes, and in attempting to show Keeting's universal status as moon Wrightson must introduce a contemporary human consciousness, that of the Ranger, into the narrative. Her use of the Ranger is intrusive and awkward, however. In the account of the events of the final night of noise-making before the night of Keeting's return, the Ranger conveys the narrator's view of the situation as much as his own. Within the space of three paragraphs, Wrightson explains two things that the Ranger "did not know" (126, 127), three that he "did not hear," and one that he did not see (126). Later, when conveying Keeting's universal status as the moon, Wrightson uses the Ranger in a similar way. Though he sees Keeting (135) and watches Keeting's actions on the hilltop, he never actually makes the connection between Keeting and the moon (146). The song linking Keeting to Babylonian and Greek myth and to folkore and nursery rhyme is purportedly meant for the Ranger (138) but is actually meant for the reader; Wrightson asserts three times in a paragraph that the Ranger does not understand what the song means (139). In the end, the specificity, accuracy, and humour of animal characterization and the lovingly detailed depiction of setting in Moon-Dark are limited by the constraints of presenting a legendary character in contemporary terms.

Such constraints, in even more severe form, underlie the serious weaknesses of Balyet. The source of the novel is the legend of the echo collected by Ethel Hassell during the 1880s in the Stirling Ranges between Albany and Bremer Bay, and published in her memoir My Dusky Friends (1975). Wrightson's interest in the legend had already led her to recount it briefly in Behind the Wind (57, 60-62). In using the legend for a second time, Wrightson again follows the rule, broken only in the Warrimai interlude in The Rocks of Honey, of using a contemporary setting. The use of such a setting, however, coupled with the use of Aboriginal material to support a contemporary theme, presents Wrightson with challenges of motivation, plot, and characterization that she cannot overcome.

In expanding Balyet's story into a novel, Wrightson is undertaking a task similar to that of Alan Garner in writing The Owl Service: she must credibly connect past and present, explain the power of the past to influence the present, and resolve the problems raised by such influence. Like Garner, she postulates the revival and strengthening of an ancient power in a remote modern setting. Unlike Garner, she does not present the action of that power unequivocally, as a re-enactment of the legend by contemporary characters who match its original figures. Rather, she presents its action as a series of incidents through which Balyet, the central figure of the legend, is revived by the coming together of human characters who parallel those of the legend or who are, according to Ethel Hassell's memoir, especially threatened by Balyet --a child and a young girl (My Dusky Friends 128-29). While Garner's story is strongly localized, its setting is one in which ancient and unbroken European settlement can be taken for granted and in which contemporary knowledge of legend is plausible. Because of the equally localized nature of her Aboriginal material, Wrightson must set her novel in the Stirling Range, where there is now no permanent human occupation, and to maintain an unbroken human link with a past preceding European occupation, must use an Aboriginal character who knows that past.

The consequences of such constraints appear from the very beginning of her novel. Garner plunges immediately into characterization of his young protagonists and his narrative of fantastic events in a remote Welsh country house containing all the characters of his story of love and jealousy. The action of The Owl Service draws much of its credibility and power from its setting in a twentieth-century community that is nevertheless insulated by geography and language from the ways of the modern wonld and is therefore mentally living in a past constantly recalled by the names of natural features and by the frequent and recent re-enactment of legendary events.

Wrightson, on the other hand, cannot begin her narrative before briefly introducing the figures who parallel those of the legend (a young but marriageable girl, and two brothers) and the child who, with the young girl, is most susceptible to the danger of Balyet. In addition, she must introduce the Aboriginal character required to connect the present to the remote past, and the child's parents. To bring these characters together at the site of the legend in the Stirling Range, Wrightson has to offer plausible reasons for their coming to the range to camp. The Macgregors' geological expedition and Granny Willet's increase ceremonies are contrived but possible reasons for spending several days in the bush, but the Burnett boys' using the isolated camp site to avoid unwelcome notice while they grow hallucinogenic mushrooms, and Jo's decision to to follow them without her mother's knowledge by stowing away in her grandmother's car, are motives that strain credibility.

Wrightson's use of Aboriginal legend in Balyet also creates serious difficulties of plot construction that Garner can avoid. In The Owl Service Garner can credibly depend upon the proposition that the whole Welsh community in the valley knows about the recurrence of the legend of Blodeuwedd, and he can use Gwyn's discoveries and experiences to transmit the details of plot to the reader while maintaining the suspense afforded by Gwyn's incomplete knowledge. Wrightson must rely entirely on Mrs. Willet's knowledge and on Jo's identification with Balyet to support the fantastic elements of the novel. In fact, only Mrs. Willet and Jo know that the fantastic events affecting other characters are more than an imagined quality of sound (18), adolescent carelessness leading to a near fatality (36), or play-acting (41).

Garner brings the past into contact with the present by concentrating the power of characterization, plot, and setting upon the single recurring story of Lleu, Gronw, and Blodeuwedd, drawing every element of a fast-moving narrative together in a compelling climax. Nevertheless, the ancient legend never overpowers the modern story. Gwyn, Alison, and Roger both discover and re-enact the old story of jealousy and hatred, and they do so in the human terms of social class and cultural difference rather than the magical terms used in the Mabinogion. Human choice, not magical intervention, brings the story to its resolution. The focus of most of the narrative is Gwyn, whose knowledge of Welsh and English and personal connection to the setting enable Garner to show the contemporary effect of the legend. Garner presents most of the story through Gwyn's discoveries and reflections about the valley, himself, his parents, and his peers during the action in which he plays a constant and eventually anguished role.

At first, Wrightson uses a similar technique of discovery to link past and present: by giving hints of possible danger in Granny Willet's warnings (9), by the curious sound of the echo (18), and by associating fear with mist (18). This technique is undercut, however, by authorial intrusion of two kinds: outright assertion, such as that of the existence of a "sorrow that [lives] in the hills" (10), and the use of

Jo, Mrs. Willet, and Balyet herself as centres of consciousness in the narrative. Wrightson's use of such consciousness is uneven; she patently withholds information in what purports to be an omniscient narration. Balancing Jo's ignorance of the legend of Balyet is the implication that Mrs. Willet knows more than she wishes to admit -- for example, the reason why the presence of a child, a girl, and two brothers constitutes a significant pattern (22). Further, one of the "old stories" that Mrs. Willet thinks about (22) is the story of Balyet, and Wrightson awkwardly reveals a little more of Mrs. Willet's knowledge of it after each crisis (22, 36, 58-59). This process undercuts the credibility of Mrs. Willet's mental life, obscures her motivation, and weakens the insistent assertion of the need for the old to offer guidance to the young that is the substance of Mrs. Willet's ruminations throughout the novel.

Wrightson uses the legend of Balyet to illustrate rather than to embody her themes of the conflict between generations and the need to adapt to changed circumstances. Each of the elements in the pattern of the legend-- the child, the brothers, and the girl -- operates mechanically in the plot for two purposes: to add conviction to the characterization of Balyet, and to support the theme. The incident of Kevin's rescue confirms the existence of Balyet and emphasizes Jo's adolescent thoughtlessness and Granny Willet's wisdom, but as soon as the child has served this purpose, he and his parents drop out of the novel. The presence of the Burnett brothers offers a parallel set of characters to the blood brothers of the legend, and Wrightson uses them to explain Balyet's increased power (78) and also to cause the contention between Mrs. Willet and Jo. Jo's relationship to the two Burnett boys is never made clear, however, because, as in her earlier work, Wrightson avoids the depiction of adolescent sexuality. Jo's following of Terry seems little more than a prank (12); her attraction to Lance is the unconvincing admiration of a youngster for a "grand" (25) "university man" (15). There is, therefore, little basis for conflict between the brothers, and little in fact occurs. Consequently, the parallel between the Burnetts and the blood brothers of the original legend is forced, and the parallel between Jo and Balyet makes Balyet's crime seem trivial and her punishment disproportionate.

The parallel between Jo and Balyet introduces the third element in the pattern, that of the girl. Wrightson introduces this element with a highly improbable incident: Terry's report of a disagreement with his brother and Jo's enjoyment of their rivalry precedes an inadvertent plunge into the water-hole that gives Jo an instantaneous vision of Balyet and an emotional identification with her (41-42). Wrightson dismisses Jo's relationship with the brothers with the awkward authorial assertion that Jo "[does] not know that the pain and danger of Balyet [have] raised her above smaller things" (76) such as infatuation with Lance. Having served as the cause of the final dispute between Jo and her grandmother, the brothers, too, drop out of the narrative.

The third section of the narrative is confused by Jo's dual role: as a girl for whom Balyet's embrace would be fatal, and as a parallel figure to Balyet. Wrightson intrudes to present Balyet's motivation (87) in order to explain the danger that Jo faces. She intrudes again to resolve that danger, describing Jo's recognition that Balyet is "old and cruel" (91), and Balyet's retreat after her discovery that she exists in time, and that her people have all died. (91). To explain Jo's ability to see Balyet, and to deal with Jo's role as "another Balyet" (48), Wrightson moves the narrative focus from Jo and Balyet to Mrs. Willet, and makes further demands upon her readers' belief in a scene in which Mrs. Willet summons the spirit of her dead teacher. Having rescued Jo on the grounds that she is "under different laws" from Balyet (96), she goes on to question the law under which Balyet is held and to secure her release into the natural world. Although this release is described in a manner that recalls earlier examples of Wrightson's ability to describe the Australian bush, it ventures on to the potentially dangerous ground of Aboriginal religion. While Ethel Hassell records the use of booliah stones for increase of game, preservation of health, and control of the weather (Friends 96) and notes the Aborigines' belief in the presence of noitch or Noatch "in deep gullies and the highest mountains" (Friends 60), there is no warrant in the original source of the novel for the scene in which Mrs. Willet calls up the spirit of her mentor, for the council of spirits to decide Balyet's fate, or for Balyet's romantic place of rest in the natural world rather than "in the far off land in the sun" which Ethel Hassell records as the place of afterlife for the Wheelman tribe (Friends 128).

After the complexity and assurance of A Little Fear and the skilful characterization of Moon-Dark, Balyet is a disappointment in almost every respect. If Patricia Wrightson continues to write the Australian fantasy that allowed her to "hurtle into freedom" in the past, it is to be hoped that she moves away from the confinement of legend, which creates so much difficulty in Moon-Dark and cripples Balyet, and turns to the program that she set herself in a letter of January 4, 1990: "to invent fantasy-figures that take Australian authenticity only from a background of known Australian folklore," for it is in short fantasies, using almost completely invented Australian figures, that her best work has been done.

Chapter Six

An Australian Storyteller

"All my schools assumed I would become a writer but I very nearly didn't," explained Patricia Wrightson in 1978. "I wasn't sure how to begin .... Only after I had been married and divorced and had two children of my own did I dare to try for them. I was very lucky to begin in the excellent and demanding school of children's literature, and my work has been a continuing exploration of it" ("Cultures" 187). When Wrightson began to publish in 1956, the production of children's books in Australia was recovering from the dislocations and shortages of the Second World War, and in the tiny local market, novels that transplanted the British holiday adventure of the 1930s to an Australian setting suited the taste of a public accustomed to British and local fiction written expressly for and about prepubescent children. From this beginning, Wrightson has taken a leading part in the development of a body of Australian children's literature that "shows an awareness of Australian landscape and society as it is, rather than as it has so often been represented overseas" (Crago 33).

All of Wrightson's novels are set in contemporary Australian society, but early in her career Wrightson moved beyond the tale of bush adventure to offer young readers an exploration, in a strongly local setting, of communication among individuals and of consequent growth in her characters' understanding of each other and of themselves. In her fantasy novels, she has retained the same

Australian setting and the same interest in depicting individual development, and uses characters and motifs that such writers as Joseph Campbell and C.G. Jung regard as being outgrowths of human experience that transcends political and even cultural boundaries. In an address entitled "Deeper Than You Think," delivered on May 19, 1990, Wrightson expressed the belief that the roots of literature are universally present in human nature, "hiding in yourself, planted by your inheritance to be discovered through need" (15) even though the stories that grow from those roots have "changed with us, and changed again, reflecting our new lands and ways of living, our new selves" (5). Nevertheless, though she has expressed the processes of individual growth in the local terms of realistic fiction and the universal terms of fantasy based upon folklore, and though she has used adult protagonists in her novels, she has never, unlike such writers as Ursula Le Guin and Ruth Park, had the experience of writing for an adult readership. Further, with the exception of _The Feather Star_, the Wirrun trilogy, and _Balyet_, Wrightson's novels have not been written for adolescents or young adults either.

Wrightson's formation as an author has been shaped by working for a child readership. Save for _The Feather Star_, Wrightson's novels from her first to her eighth concern the lives of children in the age range from nine to thirteen, roughly corresponding to the years of primary school. Ten years (1964-1975) as staff member and then editor of the _School Magazine_ published for primary schools by the

New South Wales Department of Education can only have confirmed her perceptions of the needs and tolerances of children of this age group, as well as the "consciously educational presence" that the Cragos note in her novels (33). Wrightson's avoidance of equivocation, that sometimes appears as authorial intrusion, and her unashamed transmission of information, that sometimes appears as didacticism, are legacies of years of writing, story-telling, and editing for a young readership.

In addition to her formation as an author, however, Wrightson's personal predispositions have shaped her writing:

> I know ... that I'm too "slow" a writer ever to be popular ... because I won't sacrifice construction for speed, not even for an editor. Construction is the basis of conviction, as it is of development and a final satisfying shape. I am also a "fast" writer, economical to a point that I often worryingly suspect may be laziness. (McVitty 248)

She deliberately and consciously uses the techniques of story-telling: "I prefer to know what I'm doing, or to find out quickly so that I can do it again" ("Deeper" 17). For Wrightson even the powerful feeling, engendered by concentration, that the story itself dictates technique, is as much an "illusion" ("Deeper" 19) as the idea of inspiration. Her perception of the writer's task, as she explains in "The Geranium Leaf," is to demonstrate theme through story; to develop an "argument" that can be conveyed most clearly through dialogue (178).

Wrightson's formation as an author, her notions about the writer's craft, and her choice to write primarily for an Australian readership underlie the limitations and strengths of the techniques she uses, the characters she develops, and themes she chooses to explore.

At the most obvious level, Wrightson's concern to communicate unequivocally with young readers leads her to summarize action, as she does, for example, in A Little Fear (77), or to list the possible meanings of a symbol, as she does at the close of The Rocks of Honey (171). Even when she uses symbol for a presumably older readership, she can do so in a heavy-handed fashion, using a symbol repeatedly -- as when Murra puts on and takes off Ularra's shirt six times in one page (Water 215) -- or explaining its meaning directly (Star 86) or by association with other symbols. Devices that are effective alone become vices when used in concert and without subtlety. Fortunately, the overwhelming combination of allusion, symbol, parallel, and comment by character and author at the end of The Feather Star is comparatively rare in Wrightson's work.

Wrightson's language is usually clear, occasionally flat (especially in summaries of character development) but sometimes poetic. In some of her descriptive set-pieces, she can strain metaphors, as in her description of buses as elephants (Racecourse 98), or confuse them, as in a similar urban description that brings song, landscape, and animals together in uneasy alliance (Magic 9-10). On the other hand, Wrightson can maintain figurative language appropriate to Aboriginal life for whole novels, so unobtrusively that a rare lapse such as her statement that "the love-singing was drowned in a clamour of warning bells" (Water 205) calls immediate attention to itself. Further, from the beginnings in The Rocks of Honey, she has developed the capacity to see and describe the Australian landscape with an accuracy that enables Australian readers to locate a setting precisely, and with a vividness that supports, for all readers, her use of the "old south land" as a setting for fantasy. She is not afraid to use the heightened style of oral story-telling in the opening chapters of The Nargun and the Stars, The Ice is Coming, and The Dark Bright Water to convey immense stretches of space:

> The old south land lay across the world like an open hand, with the weight of summer heavy on its palm. The wind washed over it, polishing its gibber-plains; the sea leapt and worried at its endless coast; but the land lay flat and still, full of summer and secrets. And in one far corner, north and west across mirage-shrouded lakes and polished plains and beyond the haze-hung monoliths of the Centre, the first cyclone of the year was building. (Water 11)

She also conveys immense stretches of time:

> This was the ancient den of the Nargun. Here it had lain while eagles learnt to fly and gum-trees to blossom; while stars exploded and planets wheeled and the earth settled; while the cave opened; while dripping water hollowed a pool from rock and filled it, and drop by drop

> built crystal columns before the cave. And all this while the Nargun slept. (Nargun 9)

Nor is Wrightson afraid to use alliteration and rhythmic balance in her prose: "And is not a rockpool a world among the stars? Life and death are in it, and darkness and light" (Ice 222).

Wrightson's desire to communicate clearly with young readers extends to characterization also. A feature of all her work from the beginning has been her use of the staple story-teller's technique of third-person narrative and the convention of the omniscient author that together afford maximum control at the expense of immediacy. Despite her accurate and economical use of dialogue and command of dialect, she never directly presents a character's perceptions at length in idiosyncratic language in the way that Garner presents Gwyn's perceptions in The Owl Service, for example. In several of her novels Wrightson occasionally uses a character's particular turns of phrase to mimic the process of thought (Racecourse 81, Ice 93), but only in the central scene of The Dark Bright Water, that in which Wirrun and Ularra meet the Yunggamurra, does Wrightson present a momentary stream of consciousness as the spirit prepares to seduce the two men: "Soften the smile, light the eyes to a dewy shine, and watch, watch, watch" (168). Significantly, this brief change in technique occurs in a novel and a scene directed to a readership furthest removed from her usual one.

More commonly, Wrightson uses the control offered by her narrative technique to present characters' reactions and thoughts through authorial comment as much as through demonstration or dialogue, but such use of comment has its drawbacks as well as its advantages. Occasionally her comments can become unnecessarily obtrusive. She can distance the reader from narrative and character by attempting to encompass the reactions of two characters at once: "George would not find this as reassuring as Martin meant it to be" (Earth 67); she can weaken characterization by presenting complex emotional states in flatly abstract terms: "His muscles ached with cold, his belly with hunger, his mind with the sadness of hate collapsed under the weight of pity" (Water 191). In the case of Wirrun she can halt the flow of the narrative by summarizing his discoveries about himself and his role as hero in much the same way as she summarizes action elsewhere, even though a presumably older readership does not need such authorial help (Water 216).

She can also use comment to advantage, however. With younger characters Wrightson can depict reflection using language appropriate to their speech and age, as she does with Joe Mooney (Racecourse 81), and she can offer child readers an insight into the perceptions of a person who cannot credibly articulate them, as she does with Andy Hoddel (Racecourse 81-82).

Wrightson also simplifies characterization for young readers by using a Dickensian technique of supplying some of her characters with a defining turn of phrase, such as Charlie's "M'p" or Mrs Tucker's "Tchah," or a physical characteristic such as Edie's face "made of dying petals" (Nargun 73), or an action, such as the Mimi's "catsneeze". Such traits can identify a character rapidly and, as in the case of Simon's adopting Charlie's noncommittal grunt (93), can depict development subtly. Further, as in the case of the comparison between Edie and the swamp, a brief image can define a character and provide a link to a system of symbols in a novel. There are instances, however, when such shorthand ceases to be economy and turns into the laziness that Wrightson suspects in herself (McVitty 248). An example of such false economy occurs in all Wrightson's novels up to and including The Nargun and the Stars, and recurs in Balyet: she uses one brief phrase to describe embarrassment, pleasure, confusion, uncertainty, or unspecified emotion -- the character being described "turns pink."

Most of the protagonists of Wrightson's novels are children, and in the tradition of the adventure novels with which she began her career, her children rely upon themselves, rather than upon adults, to resolve their problems. Very few of Wrightson's adult characters belong among the legion of incompetent, selfish, cruel, or limited figures that people some of the children's books of the late 1960s and the 1970s, but equally few occupy enough space in Wrightson's novels to act as mentors, models, or commentators for children or even for young adults. Tom Gordon, Charlie and Edie Waters, Granny Willet, Ko-in, Tom Hunter and Merv Bula come closest to such functions.

Tom Gordon's entirely credible articulation of Eustace's social position is crucial in The Rocks of Honey, but Winnie affords Eustace the insight he needs to come to terms with it. Charlie and Edie give Simon an example of independence, patience, and courage, but they are almost as much children as adults in their conspiratorial relationship with Simon and their attitude to outsiders. Granny Willet understands Jo's feelings, but her thoughts are directed to the reader more than to Jo. Though Agnes Tucker is an adult, her difficulties are those of an old woman who refuses to be a "fussed-about child" (7) and attains independence for herself. Ko-in's relationship to Wirrun is that of a "[g]randfather" (*Wind* 33): he supports Wirrun by providing him the "power" (*Ice* 61), and by agreeing to come to him at need (*Water* 36); he warns Wirrun (*Wind* 16) of the consequences of his taking Murra as his wife and bullies him into asserting his own existence (*Wind* 49). Otherwise he occupies the position of Aboriginal elders like Tom Hunter and Merv Bula, who can offer little more than information and sympathy to a youth who has "gone too far ahead of" them (*Wind* 58).

Because she does not create characters like Mrs Oldknow, Mrs Tillerman, Granny Tallisker, Ogion, Ged, Gandalf, or even Merriman Lyon, Wrightson's safe but limited third person narrative technique leaves her little option but authorial comment to depict the inner growth and change of the characters who function as centres of consciousness in her novels. At times the age of such characters forces Wrightson to the awkward shift of articulating for her reader ideas that characters cannot articulate for themselves (*Nargun* 62), or of asserting that they have developed in ways of which they are not conscious (Balyet 76).

The major consequence of Wrightson's choice of narrative technique and tidiness of construction is a constant awareness of authorial presence that moves all the characters and actions of her novels into the foreground. There is little sense of life going on beyond the immediate concern of the focusing characters, or of the lives of such characters beyond the confines of the novel, and there can even be confusion between what represents a character's views and what represents Wrightson's. In The Ice is Coming, for example, one of Wrightson's intentions in using the device of the three "races" was to represent, in simplified form, Wirrun's vision of the people of Australia ("Professionalist" 6), but introduction of the device before the introduction of Wirrun, lack of a sense of the experience and attitudes he brings into the narrative, and dissonance between his vernacular speech and the language of comments about the "races" quite understandably caused some readers to take those comments to be Wrightson's own. In general, however, Wrightson's narrative technique and liking for tidy structure afford readers little room for alternative or multiple views of the significance of characters, events, and settings.

The novels in which Wrightson offers her readers most room for interpretation are those in which she examines the development of a single character in a brief narrative, using the "algebra" of fantasy in a pastoral setting to objectify the processes of individuation. A single protagonist holds her to a single narrative and focuses her presentation of action; fantasy allows her to mirror the processes of self-discovery and self-development in the processes of the action and in the fantastic characters themselves. A rural setting enables her to employ the conventions of romantic pastoral either directly (as in The Nargun and the Stars) or ironically (as in A Little Fear), and to use the creatures of Aboriginal folklore in a romantic as well as an indigenizing manner. A brief narrative encourages Wrightson to provide multiplicity of meaning; in longer narratives such as the Wirrun trilogy, the power of fantasy and setting cannot compensate for the methodical linearity of her treatment of Wirrun's and Murra's growth.

Conventional narrative technique also allows ready satisfaction of the "desire to impart information" that is "an important element in many of Patricia Wrightson's books" (Crago 32). Her capacity to transmit facts grows from the obvious, seen in the questioning that elicits information about the treatment of snake-bite and the care of open fires in The Crooked Snake, to the comparative sophistication of her description of the ecology of the Clarence estuary in A Little Fear and Moon-Dark. Yet, as Leonard H. Orr notes in his review of Moon-Dark (New York Times Book Review, January 29, 1989), "there is virtually nothing here about animal families and reproduction" (39). Given her formative experience as a children's writer, such absence of details about reproduction is not surprising, and, as already noted, sexuality is one aspect of human life which

Wrightson either avoids or presents through extremes of violence and play. Commenting in 1970 on the "unexpressed sexual motivation" of Ivan Southall's Bread and Honey, H.M. Saxby writes that "[s]uch a book would have been unthought of in Australia ten years ago" (222). While the coyness of The Feather Star is therefore understandable, and while the violence of The Dark Bright Water is partly explicable in terms of Goldie's commodities of indigenizing literature, the sketchiness of Jo's motivation in Balyet indicates that even in 1989 the treatment of sexuality is not something that Wrightson can manage easily or convincingly.

Though Wrightson may never aspire to the narrative and thematic sophistication of Aidan Chambers's Breaktime, she moved quite early in her career from the simple adventure story to novels that examine the problems of individuals and of human beings in general, and did so without losing the narrative interest and accessibility of character required to reach a broad readership. At her best, Wrightson produces plots that combine setting, action, and character with sufficient logic to sustain both realistic fiction and indigenizing fantasy, and even the clumsy expression of an abstract theme in Down to Earth or the ponderousness of The Dark Bright Water do not outweigh interest in the unfolding of events. While dealing with such difficult themes as racial prejudice, mental handicap, or individuation, Wrightson never loses touch with her story. She does not adopt the tedious introspection to which Ivan Southall is too often given, and if her use of italicized cues to assist readers of The Song of Wirrun is unnecessary and obtrusive, one can set against it the exclusive and excessive cleverness of books like Garner's Red Shift.

Most of Wrightson's child characters are readily accessible, because they resemble the ordinary Australian youngsters who read about them. None of them is a genius like Charles Wallace Murry of A Wrinkle in Time; none of them comes from a particularly privileged, intelligent, cruel, or impoverished family; but each of them is capable of unsophisticated enjoyment, group loyalty, and fundamental decency while remaining realistically susceptible to irritation, prejudice, incomprehension, or self-interest. At times anger is a positive force among her characters, propelling individuals into action or necessary candour. Most of Wrightson's adult characters, too, are flawed mortals -- physically ordinary, even unattractive people who feel exasperation, manipulate others, make mistakes, but, like their child counterparts, retain a sense of basic good will. Even the spirit creatures have their limitations: the Potkoorok's jokes and selfishness are childish; Ko-in, hero or not, likes the sound of his own voice (Ice 69); and the Mimi nags Wirrun down half the east coast of the continent. Nowhere in Wrightson's work does one find the despair of I Am The Cheese or the class-consciousness and bitterness of The Owl Service, but one does not find the serene gentleness of The Children of Green Knowe either. Most of Wrightson's characters, like those of Penelope Lively, are people getting on with the normal bustle of life in the twentieth century; even Wirrun must go to work and pay the rent.

This is not to say that Wrightson ignores the darker side of human life and human nature. She can evoke terror, as in Simon's night encounter with the Nargun and Wirrun's meetings with Wulgaru. She can present, in the character and transformation of Ularra, the violence of which an outwardly attractive character is capable, and in his death the suggestion that self-sacrifice can be mingled with self-interest. She can imply, in Agnes Tucker's and Simon's recognition of their mortality, the brevity of human life and the belief that man is part of an indifferent natural order that he can damage but cannot dominate.

Nevertheless, one of the most pervasive features of Wrightson's work is the humour that maintains the involvement of readers and at the same time resolves conflict, deflates pretension, reduces sentimentality, and supports the creation of particularized and credible characters and social settings. The appalling smell of boiling gum leaves raises and dismisses in laughter one of the standard insults of racism; George Morrow's carefully judged stories make a more telling comment on white Australians than does the device of "races" (Ice 198-202); the simultaneous disappearance of two large earthmoving machines confirms the power of the natural world (Nargun 51, 57); and the disastrous outcomes of Andy's efforts to manage his racecourse reduce, if they cannot eliminate, the sentimentality of his portrayal. Further, humour is a major means by which Wrightson develops her most memorable characters and supports their credibility as individuals and their particularity as inhabitants of Australia.

Wrightson's least successful characters are humourless caricatures such as Sir Mortimer Wyvern and Dr. Leadswinger; among her successful characters the presence of humour often marks the difference between the adequate and the memorable. While Johnny Wuthergul, Tom Hunter, and Merv Bula have the dignity and calm of Aboriginal elders, the sardonic Derby's comments convey a warmer kind of sympathy and encouragement. Despite Wrightson's care to present the "gallant" and "enduring" Murra as a fit wife for Wirrun, the Mimi, by turns retiring and indignant, establishes a relationship with Wirrun that ripens through mild insult into respect and friendship. Because Agnes Tucker is funny she is neither pathetic nor domineering; because Blue is funny he is a more credibly limited dog than Richard Adams's Rowf. Frequently, Wrightson's characters express concern and affection for others in joking terms; in common with their fellow Australians, they are people who do not readily articulate feelings of love without the indirection of humour. Unrelieved seriousness is possible, if not attractive, among the inhabitants of Le Guin's Earthsea, and in its vaguely mediaeval society a young man can credibly express his devotion for an older one by saying "I have given my love to what is worthy of love. Is that not the kingdom and the unperishing spring?" (Shore 165). In twentieth-century Australia, however, even high fantasy is not consonant with high seriousness of character or language (Water

214); the hero Ko-in is capable of leg-pulling (Ice 64), concern is likely to be expressed through sardonic comment (Wind 101), and affection through mild insult (Nargun 73) or feigned complaint (Wind 153). Increasingly, Wrightson produces humour through dialogue ranging from the frantic shrieking of hens (Fear 46) to the kindly verbal sparring of Mort and the Ranger (Moon 9), using two of the strongest features of her writing to support accurate natural description in the creation of the distinctly but unselfconsciously Australian settings of her novels.

Such firmly founded natural and social settings are essential to the success of the fantasies that constitute Wrightson's best work. Her ability to describe rural and urban landscapes in Australia has grown in definition and confidence since her earliest novels, and the prevailing pastoral romanticism of Australian writing encouraged her, from the beginning of her career, to make landscape a significant element in her novels rather than a mere background for action. Even in the convincing inner city landscape of I Own the Racecourse! she calls upon the conventions of romantic pastoral to delineate the interior life of a central character. Landscape alone, however, no matter how accurately described or personally significant, is insufficient basis for Wrightson's "magical realist" strategy in developing fantasy. In addition to landscape, the confident ordinariness of twentieth-century Australian social life in her novels, conveyed largely through characterization based upon humour and deftly accurate dialogue, helps to make possible the credible assertion of the existence of the spirit-creatures of the land: the exotic Potkoorok becomes almost prosaic as the "old Pot-K" (*Nargun* 104). In such strong settings Wrightson can use Aboriginal spirits to create both an indigenizing version of the *Bildungsgeschichte* that is the essence of much modern children's fantasy such as that of Alexander and Le Guin, and a distinct expression of the post-Christian world view that she shares with Le Guin and Cooper.

Wrightson's most successful fantasies, *The Nargun and The Stars* and *A Little Fear*, add least in the way of Aboriginal material to their realistic Australian settings and maintain the closest links between their earth-creatures and features of the landscape. In her animal fantasy also, Wrightson retains as much humour and clearly marked Australian dialogue as she can, just as Kipling uses humour and vernacular speech in such stories as "Rikki-tikki-tavi." Wrightson retains the same features in her Australian version of heroic romance, but in *The Song of Wirrun* she also moves further away from everyday Australian life in order to compensate for her lack of access to two of the staple conventions of modern high fantasy: the characters and stories of Arthurian, Celtic, and Norse material as used by Cooper, Mayne, Alexander, Garner, and Tolkien; and the early mediaeval, northern European social assumptions implicit in Alexander's Prydain, Lewis's Narnia, Garner's Elidor, Tolkien's Middle Earth, and even Le Guin's Earthsea. In developing an alternative to both conventions Wrightson leans more heavily on her Aboriginal sources and on the invention that she hopes is consistent with them. She presents the action of the trilogy largely through the eyes of the Aboriginal protagonist or of spirit-creatures drawn from Aboriginal folklore.

The Song of Wirrun presents in heroic fantasy a version of the indigenizing legend already attempted by such Australian authors as Stow and White. They present their accounts of interior journeys through the eyes of white protagonists whose vision of Aborigines is distanced, in Stow's case by Heriot's increasing awareness of the asymmetrical distribution of power between Aborigines and Europeans, and in White's by the the nineteenth-century setting and narrative tone of Voss and A Fringe of Leaves (Goldie 212). In The Song of Wirrun two factors -- the use of a contemporary Aboriginal hero and of a narrative point of view that, in the main, purports to be his or that of a spirit-creature, and the almost complete exclusion from the trilogy of characters who are not Aborigines or spirits -- lay Wrightson open to the questions subsumed within Margery Fee's larger query "Who can write as Other?" The word "can" in that question has two meanings, one ethical, the other epistemological, and each meaning gives rise to a further question: "Who should write as Other?" and "Is it possible to write as Other?"

When Wrightson began to deal with Aboriginal characters and life in The Rocks of Honey, she was leading the way in examining the racism that was often an unquestioned part of life in the country that Goldie claims has "the 'worst' record" (222), when compared to Canada and New Zealand, in its treatment of native people. In 1960 the treatment of Australia's Aboriginal people was unfortunately similar, in many respects, to that of native peoples in South Africa. The Aborigines had been dispossessed of their land without treaty or compensation on the basis of the doctrine of terra nullius, which argued that Australia was an empty land to be "settled, rather than seized" (Bennett 47) because it was not "occupied by any permanent organised human settlement" (Rowley 21). Aborigines were specifically excluded from citizenship, census records, and the normal rule of law by Sections 51 (xxvi) and 127 of the Commonwealth Constitution (Bennett 10), which were not amended until 1967. In south-eastern Australia many Aborigines were of part-Caucasian descent (Rowley 114), and their families could be divided and allocated to different institutions on the basis of colour, with the intention that those who could "pass" as white would eventually be absorbed genetically into the white community, and that those who could not would be placed in Aboriginal settlements (Rowley 115-16).

The policy of "assimilation", which succeeded that of separation on the basis of colour, demanded the replacement of Aboriginal culture by white Australian culture. In order to gain citizenship rights, said Commonwealth and State ministers in 1961, Aborigines had to become part of "a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties as other Australians" (Native Welfare Conference 1). Quite apart from its insulting assumption of white superiority, the ministers' statement ignored the appalling poverty, exclusion from the most basic services, and deeply ingrained racism faced by Aborigines living on the outskirts of small country towns in eastern Australia -- conditions that exist to this day.

Unlike the vast majority of Australians, who live in the suburbs of the three major cities of the eastern seaboard, Wrightson knows the realities of Aboriginal life from her upbringing and her experience of country towns in northern New South Wales. Consequently, her approach to writing about Aborigines has been different from that of her contemporaries and predecessors among children's writers. By 1941, the presentation of Aborigines in children's books as savages, "noble or corrupt, was disappearing but lingered on vestigially. More frequently authors tended to regard the aborigines as cultural oddities or curiosities although with a growing tendency to take them seriously" (Saxby 183). Between 1952 and 1967 Rex Ingamells, James Vance Marshall, Kylie Tennant, and Nan Chauncy published novels dealing seriously with Aborigines, but their Aboriginal characters were distanced from white readers by historical or remote settings. Wrightson's Eustace Murray is not the picturesque traditional Aborigine of Aranda Boy, or the cross-cultural leader of All the Proud Tribesmen, or the tragically destroyed primitive of Mathinna's People, but a credible, Europeanized, part-Aboriginal child among clearly drawn white children in a country school.

Eustace is a representative of the Aboriginal people most harmed by European colonization and least considered in the minds of white Australians at the time, and in developing his character Wrightson shows a far better grasp of Aboriginal needs than did official policy makers. She rejects the officially sanctioned beliefs that the way forward for Eustace is to deny his Aboriginality and to seek genetic absorption into the white community, contending instead that he must accept his Aboriginal heritage and "use it with pride and care to make something good" (Rocks 175). The argument of the novel presents Aborigines as Australians whose culture is of value to all rather than as a separate group requiring special treatment; further, Wrightson's version of romantic pastoral in the novel follows the Jindyworobak theory that Goldie describes as "entwining nature / land / country with all Australian humans" (29) rather than with Aborigines alone.

In 1960, the possibility that an Aborigine would write and publish a children's book was remote, and Wrightson could justifiably claim that she was writing on behalf of Aborigines as fellow Australians, for a readership most likely to be the source of change -- children. The Rocks of Honey was not the only place in which she presented contemporary Aboriginal culture with respect; in the School Magazine she continued to do so. It was as editor of the magazine that she first discovered and published some of the stories collected by Roland Robinson that she was to use as sources for her own work.

Nevertheless, though Wrightson may have been ethically justified in presenting some of the action of The Rocks of Honey from the viewpoint of a part-Aboriginal child, her depiction of him raises epistemological issues that bear out Goldie's contention that "[t]he indigene of the white text is the indigene for the white text" (218) created by the colonial experience of Australia. Eustace, rather than Barney, hears the voice of the land because the intuitive Aboriginal Eustace is mystically joined to the land as an heir of its past inhabitants, whose life Wrightson presents in the idyllic terms of "soft primitivism" (Goldie 29), and because he is as natural a part of the land (Goldie 25) as the birds to which he is compared (Rocks 15, 147). Eustace also fits the semiotic shape of the contemporary Aborigine: he is athletically skilled (18), part of an extended family (26), and unattracted by material goods (78). Even the defeat of nature by Barney's farming ancestors has defeated Eustace's people (Goldie 37), so that Barney can plan for the future in a way that Eustace cannot (78). As clearly as his uncle and aunt, Eustace exemplifies the "central factor in all the literature on the indigene," namely, "that his ... role is invariably that of the indigene" (Goldie 215).

In 1972, when Wrightson began to publish novels that use Aboriginal folklore, she entered a different kind of relationship with Aboriginal material, one that involved the selection and use of sources, required her to make decisions about the locality and religious status of figures or stories, and obliged her to invent details not present in the original records. Her comments about these matters reveal careful thought leading to some practical rules. Wrightson believes that folklore is at bottom an expression of universal human nature ("Cultures" 199), and that Aboriginal folklore presents variants of universal stories shaped by Aboriginal culture and the Australian environment. She is scrupulous in presenting Aboriginal folklore drawn only from documented and readily available sources ("Professionalist" 8). She evinces a desire to avoid the use of any material that might have a religious basis ("Cultures" 193), and an intention, when inventing, to do so in a manner consistent with Aboriginal views of the land as she imagines them ("Cultures" 194). She is willing to state instances, to explain details, and to confess errors of invention ("Cultures" 195-97).

Such scrupulosity may have caused the Aboriginal author, Jack Davis, to encourage Wrightson to "[b]e bolder" in using material from the corpus of Aboriginal folklore (Norst 205), and there seems to be no ethical reason to dispute her use of its figures in An Older Kind of Magic, The Nargun and the Stars, or A Little Fear, since she presents them from a white Australian viewpoint and is not retelling any recorded Aboriginal story. The old creatures of The Nargun and the Stars "are not presented as derivatives from an Aboriginal socio-cultural context, but are fragments absorbed in a new integrated fantasy" (Singh 13). A consideration of epistemology, however, reveals the extent to which even these indigenizing texts depend upon the semiotic field of the indigene. The spirit-creatures of these novels owe little to their sources except name and provenance. They are limited, for the most part, to small, man-like figures whose names and characteristics Wrightson gleaned from sketchy notes, and while she follows those notes exactly in every case but that of the Nargun, she relies mainly on invention for the appearance, temperament, speech, and behaviour of her fairies ("Cultures" 194-97). As noted earlier, she makes deliberate links between most of these spirits and natural features, so that they can represent the land in romantic terms, but the major reason that they succeed in indigenizing fantasy is not because of any intrinsic connection with "the gray scrub, the red desert, the hard light and chalky shadows" of Australia ("Accident" 612), but because of their similarity in appearance, language, custom, and behaviour to Aboriginal people, or their exemplification of one or more of the commodities of the semiotic field of the indigene, or both. Even at this level, as she notes herself, the invention of characteristics for a sparsely recorded figure can be misleading. Though it "seems fantastic that [her] own personal Nargun could alter or damage the real one," she cannot now take it back despite the subsequent discovery that it is unlike the original ("Cultures" 197).

In 1977, when Wrightson published The Ice is Coming, she took a significant step towards "writing as Other." She did not herself assume an Aboriginal identity, as Sreten Bozic has done, nor did she create an indigenous narrator for the novel, but her usual third person omniscient narration presents much of the action of The Ice is Coming and its successors in the Wirrun trilogy as the perceptions of a young, male, urban Aborigine who has been de-indigenized by assimilation into white Australian culture. During the course of the trilogy he achieves both individuation and indigenization in a narrative that draws specific parallels to Aboriginal culture. His adventures in The Ice is Coming are equivalent to initiation (Water 36); his actions in The Dark Bright Water are those of a Clever Man (Water 120); and his departure into the spirit world at the end of Behind the Wind resembles that of Aboriginal culture-heroes (Rowley 70-71) who leave a natural feature to mark the place of their disappearance into the land (Wind 153).

The proposition that a universal human nature exists and expresses itself through the conventions of the hero tale and the stages of individuation is attractive, but it is open to the charge that its supporters impose a design upon what is actually diverse myth and folklore (Kirk 76). Still, whatever the truth of Wrightson's belief about human nature, and of Jung's and Campbell's theories about its expression, the Wirrun trilogy, like all Wrightson's novels that use Aboriginal material, inevitably adds to the patterns of individuation the commodities of the semiotic field of the indigene developed within white Australian culture. Wrightson's intention in creating the Wirrun trilogy and her earlier fantasy novels was to present Aboriginal folklore to white Australians in order to increase their sympathy with and respect for Aboriginal people by providing access to the "poetic and creative thinking" of Aborigines ("Accident" 615). Given the history of relations between Aboriginal and white Australians, such an intention is both admirable and difficult to achieve, and requires her to present an Aboriginal protagonist that white Australians will accept (Healy 173). Wirrun's mystical association with the land, his choice of a "natural" life in the country rather than the city, and his movement into increasingly remote parts of Australia in which traditional Aboriginal beliefs are still current, make him an acceptable protagonist in European, rather than Aboriginal terms. Further, although Wrightson has been careful in The Song of Wirrun and Balyet to use every detail of material from published first-hand accounts of Aboriginal folklore, the sources themselves are the scattered and various writings of white Australians, and each source is inevitably shaped and coloured by its author, its time, and its origin in the colonial history of Australia. That history, and its effects on both whites and Aborigines today, lie at the heart of the ethical question "Who should write as Other?"

Wrightson has never dismissed the ethical problems of using Aboriginal folklore, and her use of it has had the public support of an Aboriginal author, but attitudes of whites and Aborigines to the effects of the colonial past are changing, and as she herself recognizes in a letter of January 4, 1990, Jack Davis could not speak for all his people. It is true that until recently Aborigines had not written novels and probably had neither the skill nor the inclination to do so, given their educational and political circumstances. It may be true, as Wrightson has argued, that since the novel is a European form, it is the "turn" of white Australians "to take the first step" ("Is Your Minority Group Really Necessary?" 142) in using the novel to bridge Aboriginal and European visions of the land. The recent emergence of such Aboriginal novelists as Colin Johnson, however, calls that argument into question. Increasingly, Wrightson and other white, indigenizing authors such as Xavier Herbert occupy the ethical position of the anthropologist, and for the same reason:

> The entry of once colonialized or castaway peoples (wearing their own masks, speaking their own lines) onto the stage of global economy, international high politics, and world culture has made the claim of the anthropologist to be a tribune for the unheard, a representer of the unseen, a kenner of the misconstrued, increasingly difficult to sustain. (Geertz 133)

Political change associates the epistemological question of the possibility of "writing as Other" with the ethical one. The simple answer to the question "Is it possible to write as Other?" is "No," but as a technically conventional storyteller whose working habits have been formed by many years of writing for children, Wrightson is not much affected by "the authorial self-doubt" engendered by "paradigms, epistemes, language games, Vorurteile, epoches, illocutionary acts, S/s, problématiques, intentionalities, aporia, and écriture" (Geertz 138), and therefore is unlikely to construct texts that "assert their position as ideological state apparatuses and demand the reader to examine them as such" (Goldie 222).

As an indigenizing author, however, caught between the necessity of using Aboriginal characters and material and the impossibility of stepping outside the semiotic field of the indigene as defined by white Australian culture, Wrightson is contributing to an ideological climate of which white and Aboriginal Australians are becoming increasingly aware. As Aboriginal communities become more literate and more concerned about the preservation and development of Aboriginal culture, they require children's literature of their own, for "[i]f Aborigines are to keep their unique social and cultural and personal identity, it is important for Aboriginal children to maintain continuity in [the] sphere [of oral literature]" (Berndt 149). But "an Aboriginal children's literature suited to the needs of contemporary Aboriginal societies can only come into being when the means of creating and transmitting that literature is controlled by Aborigines" (Singh 10). No matter how sympathetically or unadventurously Wrightson attempts to "write as Other," she is running the risk of all white writers who do so: "that privilege has obliterated that writer's awareness of difference" (Fee 27). As the passage of time has increased awareness among white Australians of their ideological assumptions and of the risk of misrepresentation, Wrightson's ethical position has altered, and she is in the strange position of being cited in the same article as a writer whose work encroaches, to some degree, upon the culture of Aborigines and as an example of sensitivity to Aboriginal rights and needs (Singh 13, 16, 17).

What was considered admirable in the 1960s and ethically acceptable in the 1970s may be considered exploitative in the 1990s, as aboriginal peoples in such widely separated countries as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand seek sovereignty in nations controlled by white majorities -- perhaps with greater cause in Australia, where Aborigines have not even had the dubious protection of treaties. "The increasing interest in Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal stories is long overdue, but it must be balanced by a transmission within the Aboriginal scene -- not allowed to slip entirely out of Aboriginal hands. Otherwise, it could become something that exists only in books, or in the minds of non-Aborigines, in a new and subtle kind of takeover, a new phase of the old colonial relationship" (Berndt 149). In practice, Wrightson's intention "to plan one large story that would cut right across the field [of Aboriginal folklore] -- and then to stop" ("Accident" 616-17) was wise, for the completion of the Wirrun trilogy in 1980, three years before the first national conference of Aboriginal writers, took her close to the limits of what a writer espousing the acceptance of Aborigines on their own terms ("Minority" 139) ought to attempt. It is regrettable, therefore, that her frequently expressed fascination with the story of Balyet should have led her to write another novel using an Aboriginal viewpoint, and one hopes that she holds to the intention expressed in a letter of January 4, 1990: "to invent fantasy-figures that take Australian authenticity only from a background of known Australian folklore."

Political, ideological, and social changes of a related kind have a bearing on Wrightson's work. Since she began to publish, the growth of the women's movement has introduced new epistemological and political views into the discussion of literature. There are features of Wrightson's novels that are consonant with the concerns of female authors and the nature of female experience as postulated in the theories of such psychologists and critics as Carol Gilligan, Judith Christ, Annis Pratt, and Demaris Wehr. Politically, too, Wrightson's work shows a movement towards greater recognition of female self-determination and more frequent use of female central characters, but little questioning of the assumptions of patriarchal society and their effects on female behaviour. Technically, too, her work shows none of the multiplicity of perspective and open-endedness of post-modernist, feminist literature (Stimpson xix); rather, as has already been noted, she uses a conventional third person omniscient narrative technique, and holds very firmly to structures, especially in the Wirrun trilogy.

If an overriding interest in relationship and connection rather than conflict and separation is a female trait (Gilligan 7), then all of Wrightson's novels reflect a female viewpoint. From the beginning of her career she has stressed human connection with the land in conservationist as well as romantic and indigenizing terms, and all of her novels deal with the establishment of understanding and acceptance across barriers of personality, race, mental capacity, sex, and age. Wrightson's plots frequently reflect Carol Gilligan's description of female perceptions of moral judgments; conflict tends to occur in her novels because of competing obligations rather than competing rights (Gilligan 19, 21), and is resolved by co-operative action that enhances all the characters involved (Gilligan 74). The children of Wrightson's realistic novels have a credible sense of relative power, but also readily accept responsibility for others. Ken and Valerie of The Bunyip Hole, Eustace of The Rocks of Honey, Lindy of The Feather Star, the youngsters of Down to Earth, and the boys of I Own the Racecourse! are all conscious of the need to be responsible for the dependent and the unequal (Gilligan 74).

Typically, Wrightson's characters seek to solve problems of relationships by inclusion rather than by balancing rival claims (Gilligan 160): Lindy, in The Feather Star, and Edie and Simon, of The Nargun and the Stars, would prefer not to exclude the curmudgeonly Abel and the dangerous Nargun, and the boys of The Rocks of Honey learn the value of including Winnie Bates in their dealings. Agnes Tucker of A Little Fear, shows an understanding of the situation of the Njimbin and the other creatures with which she has been in conflict, and a desire to reach an accommodation with them rather than to dominate them (Fear 105). The animals of Moon-Dark learn that their interests are better served by inclusion and co-operation than by exclusion and competition (Gilligan 74).

In Wrightson's fantasy novels especially it is possible to discern patterns of male and female growth that conform to those propounded in the theories of Gilligan, Christ, Pratt, and Wehr. Murra and Agnes Tucker must move away from attachments to establish complete selves, while Simon and Wirrun move into attachments to establish theirs (Gilligan 8). In the end, Murra and Mrs. Tucker achieve a satisfactory balance between selfishness and self-sacrifice by clarifying their distinctness as persons, and, along with Simon and

Wirrun, accept the interdependence that enhances the self (Gilligan 74). The ideal "superordinate personality" (Pratt 137) that can be achieved by female characters may be seen in Murra and Agnes Tucker. Murra's achievement of an independent personality (Wind 136) allows her to dismiss sexual attractiveness as irrelevant to her full personhood (Wehr 72); Agnes Tucker's risky withdrawal from society, during which she suffers the fear of madness (Pratt 142), allows her to discover and accept the androgynous side of her nature and to become aware of her unconscious (Pratt 137). Both females become powerful personalities (Pratt 142): Murra overcomes her fear of fire to the extent that she makes a fire herself (Wind 132); Mrs. Tucker overcomes her fear of insanity and achieves the maximum independence that her age allows.

Murra's separate journey of suffering and individuation in Behind the Wind provides one of the clearest instances of the applicability of theories of female experience to Wrightson's work. During her journey, Murra draws power from the memory of her "green world lover" (Pratt 168) and experiences feelings of "nothingness" and awakening that Carol Christ regards as characteristic of the female spiritual quest (13). Further, as an "old" creature (Wind 97) Murra resembles the older woman (like Agnes Tucker of A Little Fear) who seeks "to integrate herself with herself and not with a society she has found inimical to her desires" (Pratt 136). In a manner that Pratt argues is typical in the depiction of the female journey, nature acts as Murra's ally in her development of selfhood (Pratt 21), and the outcome of her journey is not the male boon to society but a powerful personality (Pratt 142) created by herself, for herself, rather than in the service of man (Wehr 105). Her example of courage enables Wirrun to overcome self-pity (Wind 98) and to allow himself to depend upon her. The freely offered help that enables him to face the danger of death grows from Murra's hard-won understanding of the difference between helping and pleasing others (Gilligan 171). The final relationship between hero and spirit is not that of "Wirrun-and-Murra" (Wind 132) but one in which both accept her for what she is: a gold Yunggamurra, one that "broke free on her own" (Wind 154), an independent and complete self who nevertheless accepts the responsibility of caring for Wirrun (Gilligan 156) and the potential pain that he has not even considered (Wind 131).

Instances that match theoretical assertions about the nature of uniquely female experience or of a distinctly female viewpoint do not, however, prove the truth of the assertions themselves, and Mary Hawkesworth's warning against too ready acceptance of theories of characteristic or typical female behaviour is timely. The distinct femaleness of the themes and descriptions noted above is contentious, and depends, as Hawkesworth notes, upon acceptance of certain psychological theories, "particular conceptions of psychosexual development, specific notions about the role of the body and of sexuality in the formation of individual identity, and speculations about the relationship between personal identity and sociability" (540). In positing "a homogeneous women's experience that generates a privileged view of reality" such theories "fail to do justice to the fallibility of human knowers, to the multiplicity and diversity of human experiences, and to the powerful ways in which race, class, ethnicity, culture, and language structure individuals' understanding of the world" (546). To postulate a typically female experience of spiritual growth or characteristic female interest in establishing connections is to "claim universal, ahistorical validity" (557) that may not be justified and risks the very assertion of stereotypes that feminist analysis wishes to avoid. Hawkesworth argues against unjustifiable assertions about "knowers" and postmodernist uncertainty about "knowing" in the belief that it is most productive to follow the political course of seeking the "known," in order to "illuminate existing social relations" (557).

It is possible "to illuminate existing social relations" and to note changes in such social relations through an examination of Wrightson's work that focuses on her depiction of male and female characters in the course of her development as writer. Unlike Le Guin, whose Tehanu raises unmistakably feminist concerns, Wrightson disclaims any connection with feminism in a letter of January 4, 1990, adding the comment "I expect I am a product of my time." Nevertheless, her novels reflect the changing political status of women in the years between 1956 and 1990.

In Wrightson's novels before The Nargun and the Stars, sex-role stereotyping is clear and male dominance common in stable, conventional families. Yet even in her early work, Wrightson obviously values female characters. Balancing the males of Wrightson's early novels are assertive girls, such as Winnie Bates, Cathy Brimble, and Selina Potter, who take decisive action but do not achieve dominance within the groups of children Wrightson depicts. Further, the preponderance of male characters in Wrightson's realistic novels is a result of the advice of publishers as well as of social circumstances, and the male focus of the Wirrun trilogy is necessary to allow the central character full access to the spirit world in accordance with Aboriginal religious practice. Three of Wrightson's novels (The Feather Star, A Little Fear, and Balyet) have an exclusively female narrative focus, and five of the remaining novels show a significant amount of action from a female perspective. After The Nargun and the Stars, female characters take an increasing part in Wrightson's work until, in A Little Fear and Balyet, the central characters are dominant females: the formidable Agnes Tucker, and Granny Willet, who has taken on a traditionally male Aboriginal religious role.

A similar development may be seen in Wrightson's presentation of nurturing characters. In many of Wrightson's novels, the most important nurturing characters are male, among them Tom Gordon, Bert Hammond and the boys of I Own the Racecourse!, Charlie Waters, Ko-in, Merv Bula, Derby, Mort, and the Ranger. The most dangerous characters, on the other hand, are females such as the Bagini, the Abuba, Yaho, the Yunggamurra, and Balyet. The counterpart of "grandfather" Ko-in is the cannibalistic hag Bimpo-in.

Over time, however, the number of nurturing females increases. Edie Waters is quiet, but she has an intuitive understanding of Simon that enables her to support him without his being aware of the fact. In the Wirrun trilogy, the Mimi and Murra play crucial nurturing roles, and Granny Willet is the major source of nurture for both Jo and Balyet.

In Wrightson's novels, females lose assertiveness at puberty, though there have been some changes over time in her depiction of male-female relationships among adolescents and adults. In The Feather Star sex-role stereotypes are overtly described, and are also implicit in the future roles that adolescents plan for themselves. Guile, rather than self-assertion or superior performance on similar or different tasks, is the means by which females exercise power. Jo of Balyet is marginally less self-conscious than Lindy or Felice, and less concerned about the reactions of her mother, but Jo's attempts to please the Barnett boys belie her relative independence, and her disillusionment with Lance is not based upon conscious thought (76) or awareness of the exploitativeness to which her grandmother objects (77).

The way in which Wrightson depicts some aspects of the relations between males and females is problematic. In particular, sexuality presents difficulties for her. She deals with it mainly in the Wirrun trilogy, and though her ideal of sexual and personal relations is one based upon independence and mutual respect, she shows little of this ideal in practice. Rather, she presents male sexuality in Ularra and Wirrun as lustful and violent, and female sexuality in Lindy, the Bagini, the Abuba, and the Yunggamurra as manipulative and even dangerous. In part, her view of the female as seductress accords with the Jungian view of the "anima." In addition, Wrightson's association of sexuality and Aboriginal characters brings into play the semiotic field in which the indigene female is either an "ethereal romantic figure" or "perfect temptress and perfect terror" (Goldie 68, 84) and the indigene male is often violent (Goldie 104). It is difficult to reconcile the presence of both views of the indigene female in Murra, and to find evidence for Wirrun's change from a young man barely able to control his lust (Water 212) to a loving and self-controlled husband who accepts Murra's freedom to do as she pleases (Wind 14).

Female independence becomes an important issue in some of Wrightson's later work. It is a long step from the self-confessed limitation of George's mother in Down to Earth (159) to the independence of Agnes Tucker, and Wrightson's depiction of the relationship between Wirrun and Murra, bedevilled as it is by the problems in the portrayal of sexuality already discussed, presents Murra's independent achievement of selfhood as crucial. That achievement enables her to move from an instinctive attempt to please and destroy the male through sexuality (Water 168), towards a conscious choice to help the male and a simultaneous refusal to become sexually involved (Wind 132). Wirrun shows a parallel development from "creating" and naming Murra to acceptance of her independence and right to live alone (Wind 132).

It is also possible to note a change in Wrightson's depiction of relationships among females that may reflect her increased awareness of their solidarity. In the Wirrun trilogy, there are no relationships among females comparable to those among males or among males and females, and the Yunggamurra's eagerness to meet "new sisters" ends in her becoming "a scratched and beaten prisoner" (Water 166). In Balyet, on the other hand, Mrs. Willet refers to the ghost as her "little sister" (31), and Mrs. Willet's persistence, though she is a woman engaged in a traditionally male ritual, secures that "sister's" release.

Nevertheless, such changes as those outlined above reflect Wrightson's awareness of political and social development going on around her rather than a conscious commitment to any of the types of feminism now current. She is no more likely to write a feminist novel like Le Guin's Tehanu than she is to abandon, in favour of the post-modernism and sexual explicitness of Aidan Chambers's Breaktime, the traditional narrative technique and sexual reticence that she has shown for thirty-five years. Since 1956 she has worked exclusively in children's literature, a field which is, for her, "the place in which to struggle for directness, sharpness and clarity," the place in which "a mere sense of responsibility forces you to look again at your preconceptions and to struggle towards balance and truth" ("Apple" 4). If there have been times when her "struggle towards directness" has led her to underestimate the capacity of children to comprehend suggestion and symbol and to understand implication, and times when her "struggle towards balance and truth" has led her to state her themes in the abstract rather than embody them in character and action, there have been no times when she has lost her sense of story.

Wrightson has worked through the years of greatest growth in children's literature, and her novels reflect that growth in Australia better than the work of any other single author, since there is hardly a type of story that she has not attempted, beginning with the conventional and imported holiday adventure, developing through strongly regional realistic novels, and culminating in the fantastic indigenizing legend. In time, Wrightson's fantasies may become as dated as those of C.S. Lewis, and they may not continue to appeal to an adult readership in the way that George MacDonald's fantasies do, but after The Nargun and the Stars, Australian children's literature was irrevocably changed. For generations of children to come, Patricia Wrightson has made Australia "the magical country."

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